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by DAY KEENE

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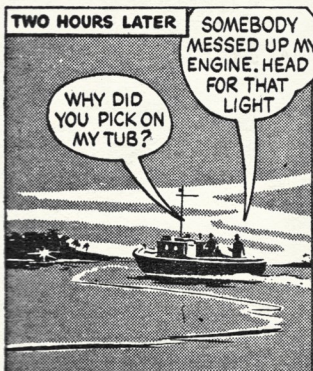
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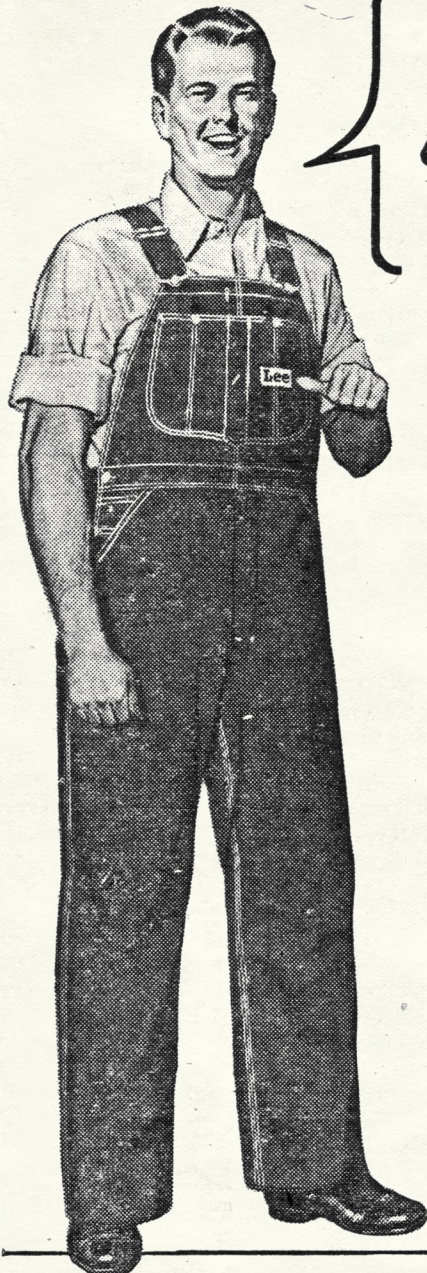
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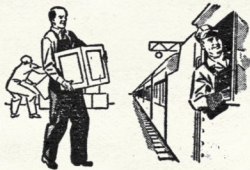


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MAGAZINE

Vol. 14

Contents for March, 1950

No. 3

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Every corpse had his price—and mine was fifty bucks a day—plus doom and board!

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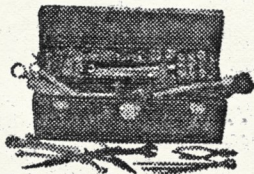
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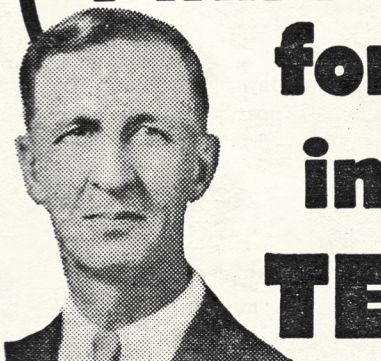


THE WITNESS CHAIR

THEY say (by the way, you students of detection might try to find out who "they" are) that nobody loves a fat man, but if it weren't for a fat man, police might be able to hold you in jail indefinitely on no charge at all. How about that? Our fat friend is here, and you'll meet him, along with a weird and varied assortment of wrongdoers and John Laws which you readers have turned up in excursions into the history of crime and criminals. This is your department, and you've been doing handsomely by it—for this issue you've made a particularly fine killing. Without further ado, then, here you are:

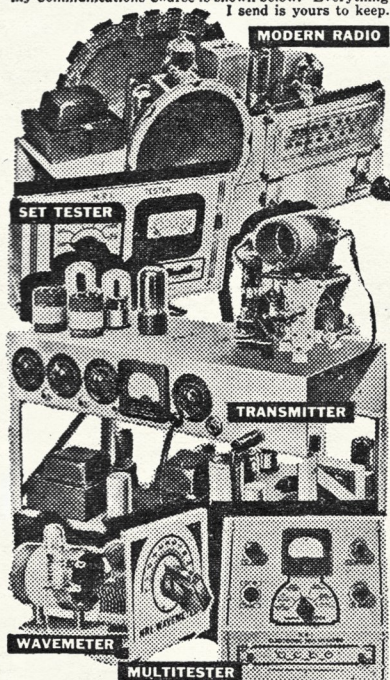
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(Continued from page 6)

Dear Editor:

One of the most important means of securing justice for persons accused of crime is the Habeas Corpus, designed to prevent police from holding anyone without good cause. The original English law was passed because of a practical joke! Lord Grey, a teller in the House of Lords, jokingly counted a very fat man as "ten" instead of "one." Had he not done so, the bill would have been defeated by a very narrow margin!

Ben Lane
Topeka, Kansas

Here's something on the origin of the headquarters of the British detective force:

Dear Editor:

Scotland Yard, the famous English law-enforcement center, was so called because it was built on the site of an ancient palace reserved by the English for the use of the King of Scotland when in London. According to a custom that began nearly a thousand years ago, the Scottish ruler was required, once each year, to visit the British capital and pay homage to England's king. Queen Elizabeth tore down the old Scotland Yard palace, and the police headquarters was built on the same site.

John Reilly
Boston, Mass.

Dear Editor:

Let's have more from Fleming-Roberts like *The Corpse Said No*. He's one of the top writers of fiction today, for my money.

Can you use this definition?

In spite of its present meaning, the term *blackguard* did not refer originally to a criminal or a potential law-breaker. It was harmless enough, designating a camp-follower of a military force. The cooks and horse boys carried with them many black pots and pans, and it was natural that they should come to be called "blackguards."

Lionel Maybank
St. Louis, Missouri

We certainly can, and did use it, if you'll notice. Thanks a lot.

And now the story of a woman who beat a fatal rap just by hanging around:

Dear Editor:

As improbable as this may sound, it seems to be true:

Convicted of harboring criminals, an English woman of the thirteenth century was condemned to hang. According to a

famous historian, she swung from the gallows from nine o'clock Monday morning until sunrise the next day, at which time she was found to be still living. She was then granted a royal pardon.

Ken Harris
Torrington, Conn.

Ever walk under a ladder? Well, just be glad you aren't in the spot this fellow was in:

Dear Editor:

Some people never really know when their luck has run out—until too late.

When he was sentenced to thirteen years in prison, a Goldsboro, N. C., offender protested that the sentence was unjust because he was superstitious. The judge thought the matter over, revised the sentence to read "fourteen years in prison."

Bill Russell
Raleigh, N.C.

Now meet Mr. Mixup, the famous author, Daniel Defoe:

Dear Editor:

One of the most famous of writers was a professional detective! Daniel Defoe, creator of *Robinson Crusoe*, earned his living as a secret service agent, and did not turn to writing fiction until he was nearly sixty years old.

Even then, he could not shake off the habit of living in stealth. Some of his books he published under false names, but wrote flattering introductions which he signed. He plagiarized his own books in works to which he signed foreign names. He wrote many letters to the newspapers, always signed with fictitious names. Some of these letters praised his books, but others condemned them!

Bertram Raines
San Francisco, Cal.

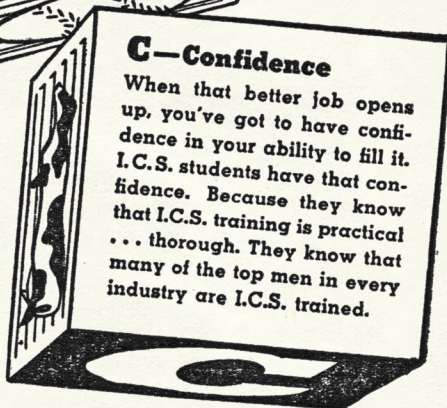
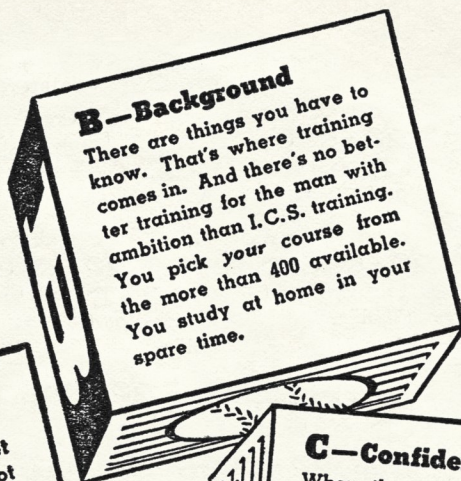
Wonder what he was driving at? Maybe he was being bothered by a bill collector. But then, authors never were too law-abiding in the old days. Dickens did time for debt, and immortalized his stretch in "The Pickwick Papers," and Christopher Marlowe spent much of his short, colorful life in the Elizabethan equivalent of stir.

So you won't talk, eh? That classic of police procedure isn't new.

(Continued on page 130)

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*Every corpse has his price,
and mine was fifty bucks a
day, plus doom and board—
just right to drive the love-
liest woman I'd ever known—
to murder!*

CHAPTER ONE

Corpse in a Bottle

THE note was lying on the pillow of the bed in my room over the garage. It was written in lavender ink on thick-scented tan paper embossed in gold with Carol Chevron's initials.



*She sprang at me, the
hypo upraised. . . .*

Andy: Come to the bathhouse on the beach as soon as you read this. I'll wait for you. Don't let any of the servants see you. Important. C. C.

I went back down the steps to the garage below, stepped out into the August sun, and walked briskly along a garden path leading to the steps which ran down to the beach below. Eloise, the trim little red-headed maid, was cutting roses by the side of the path.

"Hi, Andy," she said, and her big brown eyes went over me in cool appraisal. "You sure look handsome in that uniform. Like your job?"

I glanced down at my boots, breeches, and tight-fitting tunic. "It's a swell job," I said and started to move past her.

She said, "Look, Andy."

I paused.

She placed the roses and shears on the grass, stepped to the path, flung out her arms, and whirled on her toes until her black skirt circled high. She had a small, slender-waisted body, and I had a quick glimpse of her pretty legs encased in gauze-thin nylon. She whirled to a stop before me, panting a little, and gazed up at me with excited eyes. "Was that good, Andy? Did you like it?"

"Very graceful," I said, smiling. "Just like Pavlova."

"Really?" she asked breathlessly. "I've been studying so hard, and every night I practice in my room. Once a week, on my day off, I go to the classes in town. Soon I'll get a job with a ballet company, and then Mrs. Chevron must find another maid. I used to think I wanted to be a nurse, and I spent two years in a hospital—but now all I dream about is the ballet. It is the highest form of artistic expression. Don't you think so?" Her eyes were shining.

I backed away toward the steps, thinking of Chevron impatiently waiting in the little bathhouse.

"It certainly is," I said. "Send me a

free ticket to your sensational premiere."

"Don't joke, Andy," she said solemnly. "I mean it."

"I'm not joking. I wish you luck."

She moved up close to me. "Listen," she said softly, and shot a quick glance across the garden toward the kitchen door. "There's something I want to tell you, but I can't talk here. Come to see me tonight—around eleven. The last door on the left in the upstairs hall. Say you will."

I hesitated for maybe one-tenth of a second—then I said, "All right."

Eloise gave me a quick, almost shy smile. "Oh, good.... How do you know about Pavlova?"

"Never mind," I told her, "I'll tell you tonight." As I started down the steps, I glanced back and saw her picking up the roses she had cut.

The bathhouse was a small frame affair, painted white, with a cement stoop. It stood back a little distance from the water's edge, and I guessed that it was for the convenience of guests using the Chevron's private beach. The building could not be seen from the house, and was surrounded on two sides by a thick growth of scrub pine. I knocked softly on the door. Behind me the lake, whipped by a fresh breeze, pounded and rolled upon the beach. I knocked again.

Nothing happened and I turned the knob. The catch let loose, and the door swung inward.

I said, "Hello," softly, and stepped inside.

The place was in semi-darkness, with thin bars of sunlight filtering downward through two small windows close to the ceiling, four feet above my head. Along one wall there were rows of hooks upon which to hang clothing, and the opposite wall was taken up with four cubicles with three-quarter doors where, I presumed, the guests changed their clothes. At the far end was a shower with a tiled floor.

There was apparently no arrangement for the segregation of men and women bathers—maybe they took turns dressing and undressing. Carol Chevron wasn't there, unless she was hiding in the shower room.

The door slammed behind me and I jumped. Then I grabbed the knob, twisted it. Locked. Above the roar of the surf I thought I heard the faint whisper of swift footsteps on the cement stoop. I rattled the knob violently. "Hey!" I yelled loudly.

Nothing but silence inside, and the wind and the waves outside.

I pounded on the door. Suddenly I stopped. The narrow room began to vibrate with a buzzing sound. It was like a dozen locusts chorusing in unison. I turned slowly.

At first, in the yellow gloom, I didn't see it. Then my eyes caught a slow, sinuous movement on the floor, and I heard a dry, rasping sound, like a sheet of sandpaper pulled over cement. I saw it then, gliding out from beneath the raised door of the nearest dressing stall. I saw its spade-shaped head and narrow neck, the mottled brown-and-tan of its thick body and the yellow glint of unblinking eyes. It coiled slowly into a thick ball, its neck in a lateral S-shape. It raised its blunt, wicked head, its dark tongue flicked in and out, and its horny tail was a blurr of angry vibration. It was less than three feet away from me, and as I pressed against the wall I felt the sweat dripping down my ribs beneath the smartly tailored tunic of the uniform Carol Chevron had given me.

I watched the rattlesnake, and it stared back, unblinking, its ugly head weaving almost imperceptibly. I'm no nature boy, but I was smart enough to know that if I moved, ever so slightly, the snake would strike. I had a flat .32 automatic in my waistband, beneath the tightly buttoned tunic, but I knew that I couldn't get my hands on it before the snake would lunge

out. Still, I couldn't stand there forever trying to outstare a snake. . . .

I took a deep breath, and I jumped sideways. Almost before I moved I saw the rattler's head dart out, and the thick body uncoiled like a steel spring, and I felt the thudding impact of its fangs on my leg. . . .

I FIRST met Carol Chevron at the tail end of a hot August afternoon. I was sitting in Terry's Bar on Summit Street in the act of pouring a cold bottle of beer into a chilled glass when she walked in. She was tall and long-legged, with a slender, erect body. Her hair was blue-black, and coiled in thick braids around her head. Her cheekbones were high, with just a suggestion of hollowness beneath them, and her eyes were big and black and set far apart. Her red mouth was rather wide, but full and well-shaped, and her nose was thin and straight. Watching her from my booth along the wall I decided that she was the most attractive woman I had seen all summer.

She walked straight to the bar and said something to Terry. I didn't catch the words, but her voice was low, husky and musical. Terry cocked a thumb at me, and she turned slowly.

Terry said, "Lady to see you, Andy." I slid hastily across the leather seat and stood up.

She came toward me, her long legs moving smoothly beneath a thin white dress. When she was three feet away, she stopped and her black eyes appraised me carefully. I suddenly wished that I'd taken time to go to my room and put on fresh clothes. I was wearing a tropical cord suit which had been due for the laundry two days before, and my shirt was soggy from my day's exertions in trying to track down a missing beneficiary to a life insurance policy.

She said crisply, "Are you Mr. Andrew Abbott?"

I nodded.

A flicker of relief glinted in her black eyes. "Your landlady told me I might find you here. I'm Carol Chevron. May I talk to you for a moment?"

I smiled politely, and motioned toward the booth.

She shot a quick glance around the bar. The pre-dinner crowd hadn't gathered yet. The only other persons in the place were two men talking quietly in a booth in a corner.

Her gaze swung back to me. "Don't you have an office, or something?"

"I have a room," I told her. "We can go there, if you wish."

She shook her head impatiently and, with a swift, graceful motion, sat down in the booth. I sat down opposite her and nodded at my beer. "Drink?"

"No, thank you. I understand you are available for confidential work. Is that correct?"

"That is correct," I admitted.

She opened a white purse, took out a checkbook and a gold fountain pen. "How much do you charge?"

"For what?"

"I want you to be my chauffeur," she said, and she began to write a check.

"Maybe you'd better try the employment office," I suggested.

"Please," she snapped. "Don't be coy. You were recommended to me. I want you to *pose* as my chauffeur, of course. That way you can be near me without arousing suspicion. I require a—a bodyguard, and I don't want the police. They are so obvious." She bent her glossy head over the checkbook. "You see," she said quietly, "my husband intends to kill me."

I poured some beer into my glass and took a long swallow. Then I said carefully. "How do you know your husband intends to kill you?"

"Because he told me," she said impatiently. She laid down the pen, reached

once more into her purse, and took a small glass vial. It was a little larger than a .45 cartridge, with a metal screw cap, and it was filled with a thick amber fluid. "Poison," she said crisply. "I found it in Ashby's coat pocket this morning. Ashby is my husband. That is when I decided that I needed protection." She picked up her pen again. "How much do you charge? I'll pay your regular rate, plus your room and board. It may take three or four days—maybe a week."

I took the vial and held it up to the light. "How do you know it isn't hair oil?" I asked her.

"Mr. Abbott," she said coldly, "if you want the job, say so. I haven't much time now. Tomorrow I will give you the details and tell you what I expect of you. Will fifty dollars a day be satisfactory?"

The insurance company paid me fifteen dollars a day—when they needed me. I occasionally did an outside job, and the city had issued me a private operator's license. But it had been a slow summer for work. Fifty dollars a day was very satisfactory. I told her so. She nodded silently, finished writing the check, and handed it to me. It was for three hundred and fifty dollars.

"That is for a week," she said. "I hope it doesn't take longer than that." She took a card from her purse and laid it on the table before me. "There is my address. Report at one o'clock tomorrow afternoon. My butler, Littleton, will be expecting you. He will tell you your duties. I will contact you when I need you. Do you understand?"

"No," I said, "but I'll be there. What about your present chauffeur?"

"I am discharging him in the morning," she said shortly.

"To make room for me?"

"Partly," she admitted, "and partly because he drinks on duty. What size suit do you wear?"

I looked down at my wrinkled tropical

cord. "This shrank," I told her, "but I wear a forty-two long, and I like a two-button single-breasted jacket."

"I'm not joking, Mr. Abbott," she snapped. "You'll need a uniform. Your shirt, hat and shoe size, please."

Meekly I told her. She wrote it down on a little pad, and slid gracefully out of the booth. I stood up, too. Her eyes softened a little.

"I can—depend upon you?" she asked hesitantly.

"Sure," I said.

She smiled. It turned her rather somber beauty into a dazzling radiance. "Thank you, Mr. Abbott," she said quietly. "I'll tell you all about everything tomorrow." She turned quickly, walked swiftly to the door, and went out. I walked over to the bar.

Terry winked at me. "Nice picking, Andy," he said.

"Just business," I said carelessly.

"Nice business," Terry said. "You want another beer?"

"No," I said. "A double martini." I went to the booth and picked up the card she had left. It was engraved in gold on glossy tan stock. MRS. ASHBY CHEVRON, ERIE CLIFFS, ORCHARD BEACH, OHIO. It was a horse and country club section along the lake, forty miles west of town. Really gold-plated.

Terry said, "With a double, you get two olives. Or, if you want, you can have an

olive and an onion. We're liberal here."

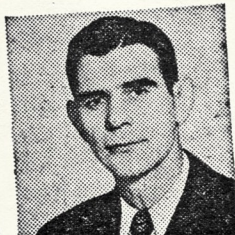
"Olives and onions," I said. Carol Chevron's check crinkled in my pocket, and I was riding high. Fifty bucks a day isn't cole slaw.

In the morning I showered, shaved carefully, and put on my best blue suit. Then I packed a bag with the clothes I thought I would need for a week, along with my old .32 Colt automatic and a box of cartridges. I didn't know what I would get into at Carol Chevron's house and, after all, even an insurance legman sometimes carries a gun. I left a note for my landlady telling her where I was going, and then drove downtown to the bank, deposited all but fifty dollars of the check, and walked three blocks to a commercial laboratory. I left the vial Carol Chevron had given me and asked for an analysis. They told me to come back in an hour, and so I had breakfast and read the morning papers. It was almost noon when I returned to the laboratory to pick up the analyst's report.

The white-coated attendant on the desk charged me five dollars, returned the vial, and handed me a slip of paper with a deadpan look. I said, "Thanks," walked outside into the morning sunlight and looked at the paper. It was a printed form listing the results of various tests and chemical reactions. Two words jumped up at me.

Rattlesnake venom.

MAN FROM MISSOURI ASKED TO BE SHOWN!



**And He Was!
Carl W. Rau Has
Now Switched to
Calvert Because
it Tastes Better.**

ST. LOUIS, MO.—Carl W. Rau, Missouri chemical engineer, is no longer a skeptic about the big switch to Calvert. "Friends showed me," he said. "Calvert really does taste better, really is smoother any way you drink it."

CHAPTER TWO

Doom and Board

A N HOUR later I drove into the village of Orchard Beach and swung north through the peach orchards. Presently I was rolling through a park-like area, with the blue water of Lake Erie on my left. The road kept climbing, and I made a sharp turn and found myself on a high rise of ground above a green valley. The edge of the road dropped off sharply to a rocky beach below. The road turned again, and I saw the stunted outlines of wind-beaten trees on a high horizon. Then I came to a pair of open iron gates and a black-and-gilt sign which read: ASHBY R. CHEVRON.

A curving stone drive between fat firs and trimmed hedges brought me to a wide expanse of lawn with a big white house at the far end. From the clear, empty look of the sky beyond the house I knew that it overlooked the lake, and as I parked in the rear before a big garage I saw the blue and white of the water below me. At the edge of a garden, steps with a hand-rail ran down to the beach, which was completely enclosed at either end by jutting walls of rock. A big new black sedan was parked in the garage. I crossed the drive to a wide screened porch and pressed a bell button.

A small girl in a neat black dress and a white cap and apron came out on the porch and gazed at me through the screen. She had smooth brown hair, combed severely behind her small, flat ears, big wide-set brown eyes, and a short, tilted nose. Her mouth was small and red and soft-looking.

"Yes?" she said coolly.

I took off my panama. "I'm to see Mr. Littleton. Mrs. Chevron sent me."

"Oh, yes," she said. "The new chauffeur. Just a moment, please." She turned and moved back into the house. She had

a slender, erect body with trim, straight legs, and she seemed to walk lightly on her toes. I waited, but she didn't come back.

Presently a voice behind me said, "Abbott."

I turned. A thin, grey-haired man in a dark suit and a stiff white collar was standing at the edge of the drive. He had a thin brown hawk's face, a jutting-blade of a nose, and cold grey eyes.

"Come here," he said shortly.

I moved over to him.

His cold eyes looked me over carefully. Then he said, "I'm Littleton, Mrs. Chevron's butler. She told me that she had engaged you. I presume you can drive a car?"

"Yes, sir," I said.

"Do you drink?"

"No, sir," I said, and I gave him what I hoped was a frank smile.

"Good," he said shortly. "Your duties are simple. Mr. Chevron always drives himself. Your day off is Tuesday, and your salary is a hundred and seventy dollars a month. That, of course, is in addition to your uniforms and board. I will show you your quarters." He turned stiffly, entered the garage, and went up a short flight of steps against the far wall. I followed him into a comfortably furnished bedroom. A door opened into a small bathroom.

Littleton said, "I assume you are experienced. However, I will remind you that you are not to mingle with guests, and you will wear your uniform at all times while on duty." He pointed at a long cardboard box lying on the bed. "There is your uniform. Your boots are in the closet. I trust they will fit." He glanced at a wristwatch. "I suggest that you get dressed immediately. Mrs. Chevron wants the sedan at the front terrace at two o'clock." He gave me a piercing look.

"Yes, sir," I said.

"We have dinner in the kitchen at six,"

he said. "You will take your meals with the staff, of course—myself, the cook, Eloise and Merton."

I decided that Eloise was the cute little maid. "Who's Merton?" I asked.

"He is the gardener." Littleton walked to the door. "You are directly under my supervision. If you have any questions about your work, feel free to contact me." He gave me a curt nod, and went out.

Listening to Littleton's precise, measured steps on the stairs I was reminded of my old top sergeant in the army. I sighed, moved to the bed, and opened the cardboard box. The uniform was of elegant black gabardine, and it fit me almost perfectly. I placed the visored cap on my head and gazed into the mirror. I looked like a Nazi officer in the wartime movies. I tried on the boots. They were regulation riding boots of fine black leather, and they were a little large. But I figured if I wore heavy socks they would be comfortable enough. I sat on the bed and smoked a cigarette. When it was a quarter of two, I went down to the garage and got behind the wheel of the black sedan.

It was a twelve cylinder job with a dash that looked like the instrument panel of a bomber. It took me a couple of minutes to figure out the fancy automatic transmission. Then I started the motor, backed out, circled the drive to the front terrace and stopped. At exactly two o'clock Carol Chevron came out. She was wearing a bright, flowered dress, a wide-brimmed straw hat, and was carrying a big basket-like purse.

I got out and opened the rear door for her. She didn't look at me, and she didn't speak. As I got behind the wheel, I had a glimpse of the thin, erect form of Littleton standing inside the French windows. *Watching my technique*, I thought, and I grinned to myself as I drove out to the road.

Carol Chevron said, "You look quite

handsome in your uniform, Mr. Abbott."

"Thank you, madam," I said gravely. "Where did you wish to go?" Our eyes met in the rear-view mirror, and she glanced quickly away.

"Straight ahead," she said. "I'll tell you when to turn. . . . How did you get along with Littleton?"

"Very well, madam," I said.

"Oh, stop it," she said impatiently. "You sound like Hector when he was sober. Turn right at the next road."

I touched the brake pedal, and velvet cords seemed to tighten on the wheels. I turned into a narrow, sandy road, and almost immediately we were driving through thick woods. The road was rough, and the big car wallowed gently in the ruts. The woods thinned out, and through the trees I saw the blue of lake and sky.

"Turn off and stop," the girl behind me said.

I obeyed, and shut off the motor. There was a swift movement behind me. I caught a flash of slim legs, and Carol Chevron was on the seat beside me. She had taken off her big hat, and her black hair shone blue-black in the yellow afternoon sunlight. Today it was not braided, and it hung over her shoulders in soft folds. She looked younger, softer. She took a cigarette from a gold case, and I held a match for her. Our eyes met over the flame, and she looked away. A couple of birds were twittering in the trees, and the sound of the surf came up to us.

She exhaled a cloud of blue smoke, and leaned her head back against the seat. "I'm due in Orchard Beach at three o'clock," she said. "For a bridge-tea. I'm staying on for dinner. You'll have to pick me up at eleven tonight. . . . What was in that bottle I gave you? What kind of poison?"

"Rattlesnake venom," I said.

She looked at me with startled eyes. "Really? That—that's strange. I—" She glanced away, and drew heavily on her cigarette.

"Maybe you'd better give me a quick picture of what's going on," I said.

"I'm scared," she said quietly. "I'm scared of Ashby—that's my husband—and I—I hate him so. I married him two years ago, when I was just a dewy-eyed kid fresh out of finishing school. He seemed romantic, and attractive, and mature. But he's—no good. I can't stand to live with him any longer. Last week I instructed my attorney to draw up legal separation papers. I agreed to pay five hundred dollars a month to Ashby, provided he doesn't molest me or contact me in any way. He became suspicious, and two nights ago, when he was drunk, he threatened to kill me if I tried to leave him." She paused and raised the cigarette to her lips with a hand that trembled.

"Surely," I murmured, "five hundred dollars a month should keep Ashby in beans and shoes. Does he love you so much, or what?"

She glanced at me quickly, and her smooth black brows came together in a frown. "Don't be crude," she said crisply. "I'm not making this up. Five hundred a month will be a cheap price to get rid of Ashby. But it won't keep him in suits from Bond Street, shoes from Saville Row, and champagne from Bordeaux. And why should he settle for that, when he now has access to all of the money father left me?"

"Why a separation?" I asked her. "Why not a divorce?"

She laughed bitterly. "I've got to live, too, Mr. Abbott. I'm an only child, and mother divorced father when I was fourteen to marry a painter and live in Mexico. Father was very bitter about it, and never forgave her. When he died, three years ago, his will specified that I would inherit all of his money and property—provided that I never divorced the man I married. Otherwise, the estate, all of it, goes to The Society for the Preservation of the American Home. It's an organiza-

tion father founded after mother left him. He was a little eccentric, maybe, but he made a lot of money in the soda cracker business." She looked at me, and her eyes were big and bright. "So you see why I prefer a legal separation to a divorce?"

"It'll be kind of a lonely life," I said. "As long as Ashby lives you can't ever marry again—unless you give up your father's fortune."

She gave me a slow smile. "I can marry a millionaire," she said, "and then I won't need father's money."

"Good hunting," I said shortly. The woes of the very rich always left me a little cold. Then I remembered the check I had deposited that morning, and I said quickly. "I'm sorry. I see your problem. You just want me to kind of hang around and see that your husband doesn't bother you—until the separation is final."

"Yes," she said quietly. "My attorney will have everything ready soon—maybe tomorrow. Then an injunction will be served on Ashby forcing him to leave my house." She shivered a little. "That is when I'll need you. Ashby has a violent temper. He has struck me several times. And I'll want you to stay for a while afterwards—he might try to come back." She flicked her cigarette out the window. "Perhaps we'd better go. I don't want to be late for the tea."

She was silent as we drove into Orchard Beach. At the edge of the village, she said, "The tea is at the inn."

I nodded, remembering the place. It was a rambling white-and-green building with a long, screened veranda facing the lake. I stopped in the drive before the steps, and opened the door of the sedan. As Carol Chevron moved past me, she said, "Pick me up here at eleven. I'll be waiting." She smiled and added. "You're free until then. Do you know any girls around here? Or perhaps you're married?"

I grinned at her. "I don't know any girls around here, and I'm not married. I think I'll go back to Erie Cliffs and take a nap. . . . By the way—where is your husband?"

"He's supposed to be fishing out on the reefs. He left early this morning." She paused, and frowned faintly. "He'll probably show up this afternoon. Be careful." She turned, went up the steps, crossed the veranda, and disappeared through a wide arched doorway.

I WHEELED the sedan slowly around the square, parked it on a side street, walked back to a bench on the waterfront and sat down with my back to the inn. People were all around me, and a group of old gaffers were playing shuffleboard behind my bench. I took off my cap, turned on the bench, and watched the inn at the far side of the square.

In a couple of minutes Carol Chevron came out, looked quickly around her, and then walked swiftly along the sidewalk away from me. I got up and moved slowly after her. She turned into a doorway beside a drug store. I gazed briefly at a display of casting rods in a store window, and then I moved swiftly to the doorway. Wooden steps led steeply upward into semi-darkness. On the wall a painted sign with an upward-pointing arrow read: A. J. CORDOVA, M. D. I went quickly up the steps on my toes. There was a small landing at the top, and two doors. One door was partly ajar, and opened into a storage closet. The other door was of frosted glass and bore a duplicate of the sign downstairs with added information concerning office hours. Three words at the bottom stood out: CLOSED WEDNESDAY AFTERNOONS. I remembered that this was Wednesday afternoon.

I heard muted voices behind the door, and the knob turned. I stepped back into the storage closet and peeked out through

the narrow door opening. Carol Chevron stepped out to the landing. A tall, dark young man followed her. He locked the door and turned to face her. He had a thin, intelligent face, thick dark hair, and was wearing a tweed coat and grey flannel slacks. He placed his hands on the girl's shoulders, and she moved up close to him. He kissed her, and there was a long silence. Then I heard her say breathlessly, "Oh, darling, we mustn't, not like this. . . ."

"Why not?" he said harshly. "You don't love Ashby. To hell with Ashby." They kissed again, and then went slowly down the steps.

I waited until their footsteps had died away, and then I went swiftly down the steps to the sidewalk and stood against the wall. They were directly across the street getting into an old blue roadster with battered fenders. The tall man got behind the wheel, and they drove slowly away.

I walked down to the Orchard Inn, found the bar entrance, went inside and ordered a beer. A heavy man with a round, friendly face and wearing a uniform similar to mine, except that his was blue, was standing at the bar drinking a whisky and soda. He grinned at me. "Hello, pal," he said. "Who you driving for?"

"Mrs. Chevron," I said.

He whistled softly. "Nice work. So she finally fired that drunken Hector?"

"I guess so," I said, and I poured beer into my glass.

"I work for old man Hennessy," he said. "He's upstairs now—starting his weekend binge." He sighed, added, "He starts early."

I said to the bartender. "Who's giving the party today?"

"No parties booked today," he said. "But there's one tomorrow. I got orders to make the punch."

I finished my beer, nodded at the man

in the blue uniform, and turned to go.

"See you around, pal," he said.

"When's your day off?"

"Tuesday," I said.

"My name's Jake Moore," he said.

"Look me up—Hennessy's, on Sand Road." He winked at me. "I know a couple of babes in a cottage over on the beach."

"Thanks," I said. "I will." I went out.

I drove back to Erie Cliffs. As I parked the sedan in the garage I saw that a big tan convertible occupied the far stall. I guessed that Ashby Chevron had returned from his fishing trip. I moved across the garage to the stairs leading up to my room. Then I stopped. Strange sounds were coming from behind the garage. I stood still and listened.

A man was shouting and laughing gleefully. I stepped outside, moved over the grass beside the garage, and peeked around the corner. I shivered a little at what I saw, and heard.

THE air was filled with a dry buzzing sound. It appeared to be coming from a low wooden box faced with meshed wire. A man with sleek greying hair, his back toward me, was stooping before the box. He was wearing a short-sleeved white shirt, white duck pants, and rubber-soled canvas shoes. He had a steel fishing rod in his hand, and was poking the tip of the rod through the wire into the box. From time to time he would utter a wild, gleeful laugh. From within the box there came a heavy thudding sound, and the dry buzzing grew louder.

The man laughed again. "Bite it, boy!" he shouted. "Grab it, boy!" He poked viciously with the fishing rod.

I moved forward until I could see into the box. A prickly sensation crept up my spine. Two big rattlesnakes were inside. Their thick, dusty-looking bodies were coiled, and their dry, blunt heads were

raised in anger. The horny buttons on each raised tail were vibrating ominously. As I watched, one of them struck swiftly. There was a thudding sound as his blunt head struck the wire. The stooping man laughed delightedly, and he poked again with the rod.

I heard running footsteps on the drive behind me, and I turned to see a little bald-headed man in faded blue overalls running toward the box. "You stop that!" he shouted as he ran. "Stop it, I say!"

The man before the box stood up straight and turned. He was tall, and he had a lean, handsome face, darkly sunburned, thick black brows, and a cruel, thin mouth. His greying hair was parted on the side and combed neatly back from a high narrow forehead. He stood with his long legs spread apart, and he held the fishing rod like a rapier. I saw him sway a little, and I knew that he was drunk.

This, I thought, is Ashby Chevron.

The little man in the overalls ran to the box and peered inside. Then he turned furiously on the tall man and shook a fist. "I warned you! Shame on you! Pestering them poor snakes. They're mine, and Mrs. Chevron don't care if I have 'em. I won't have you pestering 'em!"

He stood quivering with rage. He had a little, dried-up face, a skinny neck, a long nose, and a small mouth with the lips turned inward upon toothless gums.

The tall man looked down at the little man in contempt. "Merton," he said in a cold deliberate voice, "some night I'm coming out here with a shotgun and blast both of those damned snakes to hell. How would you like that, eh?"

The little man jumped up and down in his fury. "I'll tell Mrs. Chevron!" he screamed. "I'll tell her you stole a bottle of my venom. Just to be mean, just to aggravate me! What do you want with snake venom? I can sell it, and if you

don't give it back to me, I'll tell her. You'll see!"

"Shut up," the tall man said in an ugly voice. He turned away, and then he saw me. He stared insolently. "Who the hell are you?"

"The new chauffeur, sir," I said politely. "My name is Abbott."

"What happened to Hector?" he snapped.

"I believe Mrs. Chevron discharged him, sir."

He moved up close, and coldly looked me over. I could smell the booze on his breath, and I saw the tiny red veins in his eyes. Beneath the tan, his skin held the unhealthy ruddiness of the heavy drinker, and there were thick, soft pouches beneath his eyes. I guessed him to be at least twice the age of his wife.

"Carol knows how to pick them," he sneered. "The rugged type." He tapped my arm with the fishing rod. "Wash my car," he snapped. "I'll want it at five." He pushed me roughly out of his way, and lurched across the grass toward the house. I began to understand why Carol Chevron wanted to get rid of him.

The little bald-headed man was squatted on his heels gazing into the box and talking softly. I went over and knelt down beside him. The snakes had quieted down and now they watched us with unblinking eyes.

"Nice snakes," I said.

"You're dang right," the little man said. "Good snakes, both of 'em. Caught 'em in the rocks on the island. Good producers, too. Every time I milk 'em, I get a dandy amount of venom. Sell it to a laboratory in Columbus—for snakebite serum. Snakes is all right, if you know how to handle 'em. But that danged Ashby! Gonna brain him with a brick some time. Always pestering me. Always pestering my snakes . . . Who be you? The new car-driver?"

"That's right," I said. "Andy Abbott's the name."

He stood up and held out a hand. "I'm Merton Wittman. Glad she fired Hector. He was no dang good. Drunk all the time." He shook his head disapprovingly. Then his little blue eyes brightened. "Wanna see my aster bed?"

"Sure," I said.

I followed him around the house to a wide sweep of lawn and admired the aster bed.

I left Merton puttering with a trowel and walked back toward the garage. Passing a section of the garden almost entirely concealed by a trellis of roses, I decided to explore a little and stepped around the trellis. I saw some stone benches, a sundial, and at the far end of the enclosure stood a man and a woman. They were locked together in a tight embrace. The woman's head was bent back, and the man was kissing her fiercely. I recognized

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Eloise, the little brown-eyed maid. The man was Ashby Chevron.

I backed up silently and walked on the grass around the house to the garage. Behind-the-scenes kissing was a habit with members of the Chevron family.

It was almost five o'clock when I finished washing the convertible. Littleton, the butler, came out to the garage. In the late afternoon sun he looked like a mummy with clothes on.

"Mr. Chevron wishes his car at the front terrace," he said. "Now."

"Yes, sir," I said. I put on my tunic and cap, and drove the convertible around to the front terrace. I got out, leaving the motor running, and stood by the door.

In a couple of minutes Ashby Chevron came out. He was wearing a sky-blue sport shirt, a soft grey cashmere jacket, and grey flannel slacks. From the careful way he walked, I knew that he was feeling fine and that life was a song. He was bathed and shaved and lotioned, and the area around him exuded whiskey fumes.

"Thank you, my man," he said heartily. He leaned forward and placed a finger over his thin lips. "Can you keep a secret?"

"Yes, sir," I said, and I could almost feel my ears pricking up.

He fished a tooled leather wallet from his inside coat pocket, thrust his fingers into a thick layer of twenty dollar bills, and withdrew a wrinkled snapshot. He held it up before my nose.

"Pretty nice, huh?" he leered. "Pretty baby, don't you think, Abbott?"

The snapshot was of a buxom girl with hard eyes and a red mouth. She was wearing a too-brief bathing suit and was leaning against a rock with the lake behind her. She wasn't very pretty, and her rather heavy figure left much to be desired.

"Very attractive," I said.

"You said it, my man," he agreed, and he placed the photo in his wallet with

fumbling fingers. Then his red eyes squinted at me. "One of my little friends," he said, and once more he held a finger to his lips. "But mum's the word."

"Very good, sir," I said.

He slapped my shoulder with the back of his hand, and started around the car. He lurched against the front fender and almost fell to the drive. I stepped forward and grasped his arm.

"Shall I drive for you, sir?" I asked politely.

He straightened slowly, and turned to face me. His eyes were like red fire, and his thin lips were drawn back over yellow teeth. Suddenly his arm came up and he slapped me sharply across the cheek. I started an involuntary jump for him, and then stood still.

"Damn you," he said thickly. "When I want you to drive, I'll tell you."

"Yes, sir," I said. I was ready to duck if he swung again.

He chuckled deep in his throat, the way he had done when he had been tormenting the snakes. Then he turned, walked carefully around the car, and got behind the wheel. I stepped back. He took off with a roar. Stones flew from the drive, and the tires screeched as he rounded a hedge and careened out onto the road. Then he really prodded the convertible. It leaped forward and disappeared around the curve.

I WENT to my quarters over the garage. Since only the hired help now remained at the house, I thought it would be permissible to remove the uniform. I emptied my pockets on the dresser, changed to a white T-shirt and slacks, and went back down the stairs.

Merton came around a corner of the garage carrying a small wire cage in which were two live brown rats. "Hi, Andy," he said. "I'm gonna feed my snakes. They each get a rat once a week. Wanna watch?"

"No, thanks," I said. "I think I'll take a little walk."

Merton began to chuckle. "I heard that dang Ashby pull outta here hell-bent. Sometime he's gonna mash his brains out on a fence post." He cocked a quizzical eye at me. "Now wouldn't that be sad?"

"It sure would," I said.

He walked away, still chuckling. "See you at supper, Andy," he said cheerfully, and disappeared behind the garage. I heard him call, "Your eats is coming, boys."

I walked out to the road, sat on a rock overlooking the beach and smoked a cigarette. When the sun was a red ball at the edge of the water I returned to the house and entered the kitchen. The household staff was already eating—Merton, Littleton, Eloise, and a cheery fat German cook named Mrs. Lauterbach. They all greeted me in friendly fashion except Eloise, the little maid, who kept her eyes on her plate and ate silently.

Afterwards I sat on the back steps with Merton in the cool of the evening and he told me about racoon hunting in the pine woods south of Erie Cliffs. When the mosquitoes got bad I said good night to Merton and went up to my room and took a nap. At ten-thirty I got up, put on the uniform and drove the sedan into the village of Orchard Beach.

Carol Chevron was waiting on the steps of the inn. As I got out and opened the car door for her, she said, "Right on time. You make a very acceptable chauffeur." She sounded happy, and in the light from the inn I saw that her eyes were shining. She sat in front beside me, and she was silent until we had left the village and were driving towards Erie Cliffs. Then she said, "Why so grave, Mr. Abbott?"

I glanced at her. "Was it a nice party?"

"Lovely," she breathed. "A very nice party."

I said, "Did the doctor enjoy it, too?"

She was silent for a moment, and then she said coldly, "I'm not paying you to spy upon me, Mr. Abbott."

"Sorry," I said, "but spying is sort of an occupational disease with me. Don't worry about it. I liked the doctor's looks. I just want you to know that you don't have to play games with me."

She was silent for a second, and then she laughed. "I forgive you," she said. "In fact, I think I'm glad you found out about Alfred—his name is really Alfredo. Now I can talk to someone about him."

"Doctor Alfredo Cordova," I said. "Spanish—and romantic."

"And wonderful," she added. "I love him. I am proud that I love him. When I've been with him, and then return to a man like Ashby—"

I looked at her. She was staring at the dark road ahead, and I saw the glitter of tears in her eyes, and the bitter twist of her lips. I had a queer, uneasy sensation, and I shifted my position behind the wheel.

She said softly, "Alfred just works here to make money to carry on his research in heart disease. He maintains a little laboratory in the city, and he almost starves. He needs so many things, and I can help him. That is why I want to keep father's money—to help Alfred. Now you know why I can't divorce Ashby. If it just weren't for Ashby—" Her voice broke, and she looked at me. "Did he come back?"

"Yes," I said, "but he went away again."

She said bitterly, "Ashby must have his fun. Did you meet him? What did you think of him?"

"If you'll pardon my saying so," I said, "he's a heel of the very first degree."

"I haven't any illusions about Ashby," she said. "Not after living with him for two years."

"You can stop worrying about the snake venom," I told her. "Merton claims

that Ashby stole it from him, just to be mean. Does that sound like Ashby?"

She hesitated a moment, and then she said thoughtfully. "Yes—yes, it does. Ashby is capable of a thing like that. He's a bully, and he—he's nasty. He has always tormented poor Merton. I—I thought of Merton this afternoon, when you mentioned the snake venom. But Merton has been with our family for years—since I was a little girl."

"Let's talk about Alfredo," I said.

She laughed softly. "Don't get me started. . . . Is—is it wrong for me to love him?"

"Hell, no," I said. "Not with a husband like Ashby. But what good is it going to do you? You can't marry him."

"I know. But if I can be near Alfredo—and help him. That will be enough."

"At least," I said, "for as long as Ashby lives." I don't know why I said it, but I had had an uneasy feeling since sundown.

She gave me a queer, startled look. "Ashby's kind live forever," she said in a strained voice. She paused and then added, "I called my attorney this afternoon. He's all ready. The injunction papers will be served tomorrow."

"Fine," I said.

Her fingers plucked at my sleeve. "I—I'm scared—at how Ashby will take it. You'll stay close to the house tomorrow, won't you?"

"Sure," I said. "If he gets rough, can I forget that I'm a humble servant?"

"Yes, of course. But I hope Ashby won't make a scene."

Privately I hoped that Ashby would make a scene. I hadn't forgotten the slap on my face.

The house at Erie Cliffs loomed big and pale in the moonlight as I stopped the sedan by the front terrace. I started to get out to open the door, but Carol Chevron placed a hand on my arm.

"Don't bother," she said softly. "No

one is watching now." She got to the drive and peered in at me. The moonlight made blue shadows of her eyes. "See you in the morning. Good night." She ran lightly across the terrace and entered the house. I waited a minute until I saw a light come on in an upstairs room, and then I drove around to the garage.

As I went up the stairs to my room I saw that Ashby Chevron's convertible was still out. I thought grimly: *Have a good time tonight, Ashby my boy, for tomorrow you lose your happy home.*

I went to sleep quickly. Sometime during the night a queer sound awakened me. I lay still and stared at the moonlight on the wall. It was a thick, chuckling sound—idiotic, almost inhuman. It seemed to be coming from directly beneath my window. I got out of bed, unhooked the screen, and leaned out. In the bright moonlight I saw Ashby Chevron. His coat lay on the grass beside him, and he was squatting before Merton's improvised snake cage. From time to time he would beat on the wire with his fist, and then he would chuckle insanely. I knew that he was as drunk as a man could get.

The scene below me filled me with a kind of a horror and a loathing. I shivered a little, and looked at my wrist watch in the moonlight. Almost four o'clock in the morning. I closed the screen softly, hooked it, and returned to my bed. To hell with Ashby Chevron, I thought. If he wanted to flirt with a couple of deadly rattlesnakes, I wasn't going to stop him. Maybe he got some kind of perverse pleasure out of it. As I went back to sleep I could still hear his drunken giggling.

CHAPTER THREE

Deathward Eyes

THE lake was a deep, serene blue, and the morning was fresh and sunny. Apparently I was the first one out of bed in the Chevron household.

As I stepped out to the drive, I saw that Ashby's convertible was parked sideways in the drive, with the front wheels on the grass. I drove the car into the garage. There was an empty whiskey bottle on the front seat, a sprinkling of hairpins, and a woman's red plastic comb. I went out and sat in the sun and smoked and waited for signs of life from the kitchen so that I could go in and get some coffee.

A car came up the drive and stopped. White letters on the door read, SHERIFF'S PATROL. A tall young man in a khaki shirt and a brown felt hat got out. A silver shield was pinned to the flap of his left shirt pocket, and a black revolver holster dangled from his belt. I stood up. He came over to me.

"Morning," he smiled. "Where'll I find Mr. Ashby Chevron?"

"In bed," I said.

"Can I see him?"

"You can view him," I said, "but he won't be able to talk until about three o'clock this afternoon."

The young man grinned. "Big night, huh? You work here?"

"I drive for Mrs. Chevron."

"Is she around?"

"In bed too," I told him.

He hesitated, and then he took a folded paper from his hip pocket. "I'm a deputy from the sheriff's office. It's pretty important."

"Come on," I said, and I led him to the

back door. I pressed the bell button. It took Littleton about three minutes to get to the door. He was wearing a maroon silk dressing gown, and there was shaving cream on his lean face. He stared at me coldly. "What is it, Abbott?"

"Sheriff's deputy to see Mrs. Chevron," I said. "It's important."

Littleton hesitated a second. Then he said, "Very well—step inside."

The deputy and I waited in the big living room while Littleton marched up the stair with brisk, measured steps. The deputy took off his hat and gazed about. "Some joint," he murmured.

In a couple of minutes Carol Chevron came down the stairs. She was wearing a long, clinging robe of a soft blue material, and her black hair had been hastily brushed back from her face. Her lips were colorless in the morning light, but her eyes were bright and alert.

She gazed at the deputy and said crisply, "Good morning. I didn't expect you this early. Is everything in order?"

The deputy unfolded the paper, and cleared his throat. "I believe so, ma'am. This is an injunction restraining your husband from molesting or contacting you. I am here to serve it on him, and to see that he leaves peaceably, and that he does not take anything with him that you do not wish him to take."

"Very well," she said steadily, and she looked at me. "Mr. Abbott, will you ac-



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company this gentleman to Mr. Chevron's room? It is the first door on the left in the main hall. I will remain in my room until after he has left." She was nervous as hell, but fighting to control it. She turned and went back up the stairs. I heard a door slam, followed by the click of a lock.

I jerked my head at the deputy, and the two of us went up the stairs. I rattled my knuckles on the first door on our left. I didn't expect to get an answer, because I knew in what condition Ashby Chevron had gone to bed. I waited maybe three seconds, and then I twisted the knob. The door opened, and I poked my head inside.

Ashby Chevron wasn't in his bed. He lay on the floor almost at my feet. I took one look at him, and that was enough. He was as dead as he would ever be, and he hadn't died easily. He lay twisted, his legs drawn up, his arms flung out. His mouth was open, and his eyes were bulging. He had obviously been very sick, and his shirt was still damp with perspiration.

"What the hell!" the deputy exclaimed. He pushed past me and knelt down beside the body. I got down on my knees beside him. The deputy reached a hand for Ashby's wrist, and then paused. I looked at the dead man's arm, and I knew why the deputy hadn't touched it to feel for a pulse. The wrist was so swollen that the skin was shiny and tight-looking. The fingers of the hand were puffy and a faint bluish color. On the inside of the wrist I saw two tiny blue punctures.

The deputy raised awed eyes to mine. "What happened to him?" he muttered.

I took a deep breath, remembering a squatting figure in the moonlight before a snake cage. Then I said slowly, "A snake bit him. A rattlesnake—in the vein of his wrist."

The deputy stood up. "I don't get it," he said.

"You will," I said. "Better call the sheriff."

He looked around the room. "Where's the telephone?"

"Downstairs," I told him. "Go ahead. I'll stay here."

He left, and I placed a hand on Ashby Chevron's bare throat. There wasn't a trace of pulse, and his flesh was already cooling. He was still wearing the flannel slacks and the blue shirt, but he had taken off his shoes. I looked around the room. His coat lay on the floor by the bed. I went over and took his wallet from the inside pocket. The photo of the girl in the bathing suit was still inside, but the thick layer of twenty dollar bills was gone. I replaced the wallet, stepped out to the hall, and closed the door.

I guessed at the location of Carol Chevron's room and rapped gently on a door. She opened it immediately, as if she had been waiting. Her hair was combed, and it now lay over her shoulders in soft gleaming folds. She had applied lipstick, but the bright redness made her face seem paler.

She stared at me silently, and then said quietly, "He—he's left the house?"

"He's dead," I said.

Her slender body swayed a little, and I saw her fingers tighten on the door knob.

I told her everything, as quickly as possible, and when I had finished, she took a deep breath.

"I—" she said. "I—" She leaned against the door, and I stepped forward quickly and placed an arm around her. I led her to a chair by a sunny window. She leaned her head back and closed her eyes. "I am sorry for Ashby," she whispered, "but I—I don't feel anything else Don't leave me."

I moved to the door. "I'll be back," I told her, and went out softly.

The young deputy was coming up the stairs. There was sweat on his face.

"Sheriff's coming," he panted. "So is Dr. Cordova."

"Cordova?" I said.

"Yes. He's the coroner during the summer. Did you tell Mrs. Chevron?"

"Yes, I told her," I said.

He passed a hand over his forehead in relief. "Golly," he breathed. "I've only been deputy since last election. This is a hell of a thing." We returned to Ashby Chevron's room. He was still there, and he was still dead.

AN HOUR and half later I sat on the beach and tossed stones into the water. The sheriff and his deputy had gone, and an ambulance from Orchard Beach had taken away the body of Ashby Chevron. Dr. Cordova had arrived with the sheriff, and the two of them had questioned all of us—Littleton, Mrs. Lauterbach, Merton, Eloise, and myself. Each of us, except Littleton, had testified that Ashby had been in the habit of teasing Merton's snakes. It seemed that I wasn't the only one who had heard him at the cage the night before. Eloise said she had heard him, and so had Mrs. Lauterbach, the cook.

"Yah," she said, shaking her head. "*Ach du Himmel!* Often I hear Herr Chevron. Und last night again I hear him."

Littleton, the butler, had denied any knowledge of Ashby's pleasant little habit, and Merton had snickered. "You front-of-the-house fellers," he cackled, "never know what's a-going on in the back yard."

I could still hear Dr. Cordova's quiet voice as he spoke to the assembled staff: "... an unfortunate occurrence. As coroner of this county I am required by law to determine the cause of death under unusual circumstances. After due consideration, it is my professional opinion that Ashby Chevron died from the effects of rattlesnake venom. All the indications are present—swelling of the member bit-

ten, the twin fang punctures, excessive perspiration, vomiting, contorted features Ordinarily a poisonous snake bite can be successfully treated by injection of serum, ligation, and drainage incisions. However, when a vein is punctured, as in the case of Mr. Chevron, treatment must be prompt and positive, or the patient dies very quickly. It has been established that Mr. Chevron was in the habit of annoying poisonous snakes kept on these premises, and that he was so engaged at an early hour this morning. . . . I have inspected the cage, and it is entirely possible for one of the reptiles to strike a person's wrist if it were pressed against the wire. At the request of Mrs. Chevron I will perform an autopsy, and will submit my final report in the morning."

I was the last to leave the room following Dr. Cordova's little speech. As I did, I glanced back, and saw him moving slowly up the stairs, carrying his bag, presumably on his way to Carol Chevron's room to offer his professional services, if needed. I didn't care, and I don't think anyone was very sorry about Ashby Chevron's death.

The sun was almost directly overhead. I stood up and walked back to the house. In the garden I came upon Eloise, the little maid, sitting on a bench staring out over the lake with sombre eyes. She looked at me dully, and I said, "You kind of liked him, didn't you?"

"Why—why do ask that?"

I smiled at her. "No offense—but I happened to see you with him by the rose trellis yesterday afternoon."

She glanced away from me. "He was all right," she said quietly, "if you understood him. And he was lonely—" She lowered her head and stared at her clasped hands.

"I'm sorry," I said gently, and I held out a package of cigarettes. "Smoke?"

She shook her head, and stood up. "No, thank you. I must cut some roses for the

table." She started to move away, and I touched her arm. She paused, and gazed at me with puzzled eyes.

I said, "This has been on my mind, and I've to tell someone. But keep it quiet. Dr. Cordova says that Ashby was bitten by a snake in the vein of his wrist. With both fangs—and through wire mesh. Those snakes couldn't have been very lively or vicious. Merton had fed them a few hours before. A rattlesnake doesn't eat very often, and when he does he is sleepy and dopey for quite a while afterward." I grinned at her. "I learned that when I was a Boy Scout. Your room isn't far from Ashby's. Did you hear anything unusual last night—after he entered his room, I mean?"

She moved her head slowly from side to side. "No. I woke up some time during the night, and I heard him out by the cage. But I'm used to that. He—he liked to torment Merton's snakes." She shivered slightly. "I went back to sleep, and I didn't hear anything more. Why do you ask?"

I shrugged. "Just a crazy idea, maybe. Forget it. I think I'll take a walk before I clean up for lunch."

She watched me silently as I moved away.

I walked along the road, away from Erie Cliffs. The sun was hot, but when I unbuttoned the tight black tunic the butt of the .32 automatic protruding from my waistband was revealed. I buttoned up again.

A half hour later I returned to my room over the garage, and that is when I found the note from Carol Chevron asking me to meet her in the bath house on the beach.

I DIDN'T feel any pain when the rattler's fangs struck—just a thudding blow. I unbuttoned the tunic with frenzied fingers, and jerked the .32 from my waistband. The snake was retreating,

slithering with a dry rasping sound over the cement. It coiled in a corner, and raised its ugly head. Once more the dry buzzing sound filled the air. My hand wasn't very steady, but I fired three shots. The blast of the reports seemed to shake the walls. The snake began to writhe and twist, and I saw bright blood on the floor. I ran to the door, fired two shots into the lock, and lunged against the door with my shoulder. The lock let loose with a splintering sound, and I stumbled out over the sand in the hot sunshine.

I sat down, jerked off my boot, and looked at my leg. I didn't see any fang marks, and I inspected the boot. Two tiny punctures had not quite penetrated the stiff leather. There was a sticky liquid around the holes, and I had a cold feeling along my spine. I put the boot back on, walked swiftly across the beach and up the stairs to the garden.

The first person I saw was Merton. He was weeding a flower bed, and he gave me a toothless grin. "Hi, Andy," he said. "Just about time to put on the feed bag."

"Yeah," I said, and hurried into the house. Mrs. Lauterbach called cheerily from the kitchen. "Soon we eat. Chicken und noodles today."

I moved through the big paneled dining room and entered the long room at the front of the house. Littleton was arranging flowers on the mantel. "Abbott," he said sternly, "you know you are not permitted in this part of the house."

I ignored him, and started up the stairs. I met Dr. Cordova coming down. He stopped and said pleasantly, "Hello, there. Mrs. Chevron has just told me that you—"

"Yeah, yeah," I muttered, and I brushed past him. As I gained the upper hall, I glanced back. Dr. Cordova was staring upward at me with a startled expression. I walked swiftly down the big hall.

Carol Chevron was standing in the door

of her room. She regarded me gravely. I stared at her for maybe three seconds, and her black brows came together in a faint frown. "What is it?" she asked quietly.

I said, "I was just going to ask you if you left a note in my room asking me to meet you in the bathhouse, but I know that you didn't."

"No, of course not," she said in a puzzled voice. "But—"

"Never mind," I said, and I moved swiftly down the hall to the last door on my left and rattled my knuckles.

The door opened slowly, and Eloise stood facing me. She let out a little gasp, and her face turned the color of dirty snow. She backed away from me in horror, like a person seeing a corpse sit up in a coffin. I stepped inside, and closed the door behind me. On the bed was an open bag filled with clothing, and the empty drawers of a dresser were pulled out. I leaned against the door. "Surprise," I said. "The snake didn't get me."

She stood trembling. Her mouth worked, but no sound came out. Both of her hands were thrust deep into the pockets of the jacket of a smooth tan gabardine suit. I felt mean, and I moved slowly toward her. "Twenty minutes ago," I told her, "you performed some fancy dance steps for me on the garden path. What for? To give me a little entertainment before I kept a date with a

rattlesnake?" I waited for her to speak. She stood frozen.

"You told me you used to be a nurse," I said, "and therefore you know how to use a hypodermic needle. Why did you inject snake venom into Ashby last night? Because you're nuts about him, and he was chasing another woman?"

She moved backward two slow steps. "No, no—" she whispered.

"Listen," I said harshly, "a little while ago, in the garden, I hinted to you that a snake didn't bite Ashby. That worried you, and so you faked a note on Mrs. Chevron's stationery. I know it was a fake, because Mrs. Chevron has always called me 'Mr. Abbott'—not 'Andy.' Then you moved one of Merton's snakes to the bathhouse, took the key, and waited in the garden to make sure that I took the bait. After I entered the bathhouse, you ran down, locked the door, knowing that I couldn't get out, and that I couldn't make anybody hear me down there. Right now I'm supposed to be dying of snake bite, but my boots were thick, and I had a gun. You didn't figure a dumb chauffeur would be packing a gun, did you?"

She took a deep breath, and I could see her pulling her nerves into line. "You—you're crazy," she said. She turned to the bed, closed the bag, picked it up, and moved toward me. "I'm leaving," she said coldly. "Get out of the way."

I shook my head slowly. "Where is the



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hypo you used? There'll be fingerprints on it, and on the doorknob of Ashby's room, and on his wallet. I know that you framed my rendezvous with the snake, because of all the people around here you were the only one to show surprise at seeing me just now. Even if the snake didn't get me, you figured I would still be locked in the bathhouse, to give you getaway time. Start talking!"

Her eyes wavered, and she lowered her head, like a little girl caught with her finger in the cake frosting. But she didn't say anything. I moved close to her.

"Look," I said gently, "I'm not a cop, and nobody's mourning for Ashby. As far as the world is concerned, Ashby died accidentally. Nobody knows what we know. Maybe we can make a deal. . . . How much money was in Ashby's wallet?"

I hit pay dirt. Her face tilted upward slowly, and I saw a sudden bright gleam in her eyes. Then she laughed deep in her throat.

"How much?" I murmured.

"Eleven hundred dollars," she whispered.

"Half for me?" I asked softly.

"Yes, yes. . . ."

I kissed her then, and her lips were cool and soft. I would have enjoyed it—if I could have forgotten about the rattler in the bathhouse. Presently she pushed herself gently away from me. "I—I must go," she said breathlessly. "I'm catching a train for New York tonight. I'll get a job, dancing, and I'll study, and I'll work, and maybe some day—" Her eyes were shining.

"And leave me here alone?" I said reproachfully.

"Come along," she said softly.

I shook my head. "It would look funny—both of us leaving. Maybe, later, I can join you."

With her left hand she reached into a pocket of her jacket and took out a thick roll of bills. "There it is," she said. "All

of it. It's mine. He promised it to me—" her lips twisted bitterly—"To continue my studies of dancing. But he never gave it to me. Yesterday afternoon, in the garden, I asked him again. He told me to wait for him until he came home last night. I waited, for hours, and then I heard him drive in, and I heard him at the snake cage. When he came up to the house, I met him, and I asked him for the money. He kissed me—I told him if he didn't pay me the thousand dollars he had promised me for ballet lessons, I'd tell Mrs. Chevron. He—he flew into a rage then, and he said he had never intended to give me a penny, and he slapped me, hard. He grabbed my arm and slapped me again. I got scared then, and I twisted away from him, and I ran. He chased me, but I hid in the shrubbery, and I heard him swearing as he looked for me. After a while he went into the house." She paused, and said mockingly, "Do you want to hear the rest?"

"Just a minute," I said, and counted out five hundred and fifty dollars from the money she had given me. I handed her the rest.

As she thrust it into her jacket pocket, she said. "Now we're square. I can trust you, Andy?"

As I pocketed my share, I said, "We'll have to trust each other now."

She stared at me with brooding eyes. "I killed him," she said softly. "There is no point in trying to kid you. I hated him. I've hated him for a long time—for the kind of a man he was. When he touched me it was like—like being near a snake. But he kept promising me the money, and I wanted to get ahead. I guess I went a little crazy last night. I sneaked a bottle of venom from Merton's room in the basement. I knew where he kept it, because I clean his room. I have my kit from nurse's training, and I put the venom in the hypo and went up to Ashby's room. He was too drunk to know what I was

doing. He never moved when I made the injections—two of them, like a snake's fangs, in his wrist—" She shrugged, and added. "Then I took all the money in his wallet. It was mine."

I had heard enough, but I wanted her to finish it. I moved to the door, and with my hand on the knob, I said, "Well, good luck—and thanks for cutting me in." I grinned at her. "And no hard feeling about the snake in the bathhouse."

She gave me a slow, mischievous smile. "I'm sorry about that, Andy—now. But you shouldn't have scared me by hinting that a snake hadn't killed Ashby. . . . Mean of me, wasn't it?"

I sighed deeply, and I said, "Yeah. Be sure and tell it to the jury the way you told me."

Her small body jerked as if I had struck her. And then her small mouth hardened, and her eyes narrowed. She moved slowly toward me. "Damn you," she whispered hoarsely. "First Ashby, now you—"

I watched her uneasily. She looked like a madwoman. Suddenly she sprang for me. Her right hand darted from her jacket pocket, and I caught the bright wicked wink of steel and glass. Her hand shot downward, straight for my chest. I leaped sideways, grabbed her wrist, and twisted violently. She moaned, and a bright object fell to the rug. I pushed her roughly away from me, and she fell across the bed. I leaned down and picked up a hypodermic needle. It was about a quarter full of a thick amber fluid. I held it gingerly, and gazed at the girl. She turned slowly on the bed to stare at me with wild eyes.

I went out quickly and locked the door.

Dr. Cordova and Carol Chevron stood side by side in the hall. They stared at me dumbly.

"Call the sheriff," I said wearily. "We need him again."

I'LL skip what happened during the next hour and a half. I didn't enjoy it. After things had quieted down, I changed my clothes, packed my bag and put it in my car. Then I went in to say good-by to Carol Chevron. She was sitting alone in the library staring pensively out of a window.

I said, "You've got a refund coming. I only worked since noon yesterday. I'll send you my check."

She shook her head. "No—our account is settled." She hesitated, and then said with a half smile, "Unless you'd like to be my permanent chauffeur."

"No, thanks," I said. "Good luck."

"Thank you, Mr. Abbott," she said quietly.

I went out.

I stopped at the Orchard Inn for a drink. I figured I had earned it. Jake Moore, the chauffeur in the blue uniform, was again standing at the bar. He glanced at my street clothes. "I thought your day off was Tuesday," he said.

"It's been changed," I said, and I ordered a scotch and soda.

He said, "Old man Hennessy is still upstairs. How about you and me going over to the beach and seeing them two babes I told you about?"

"Sure," I said, and I drank my scotch in three swallows. "Let's go."

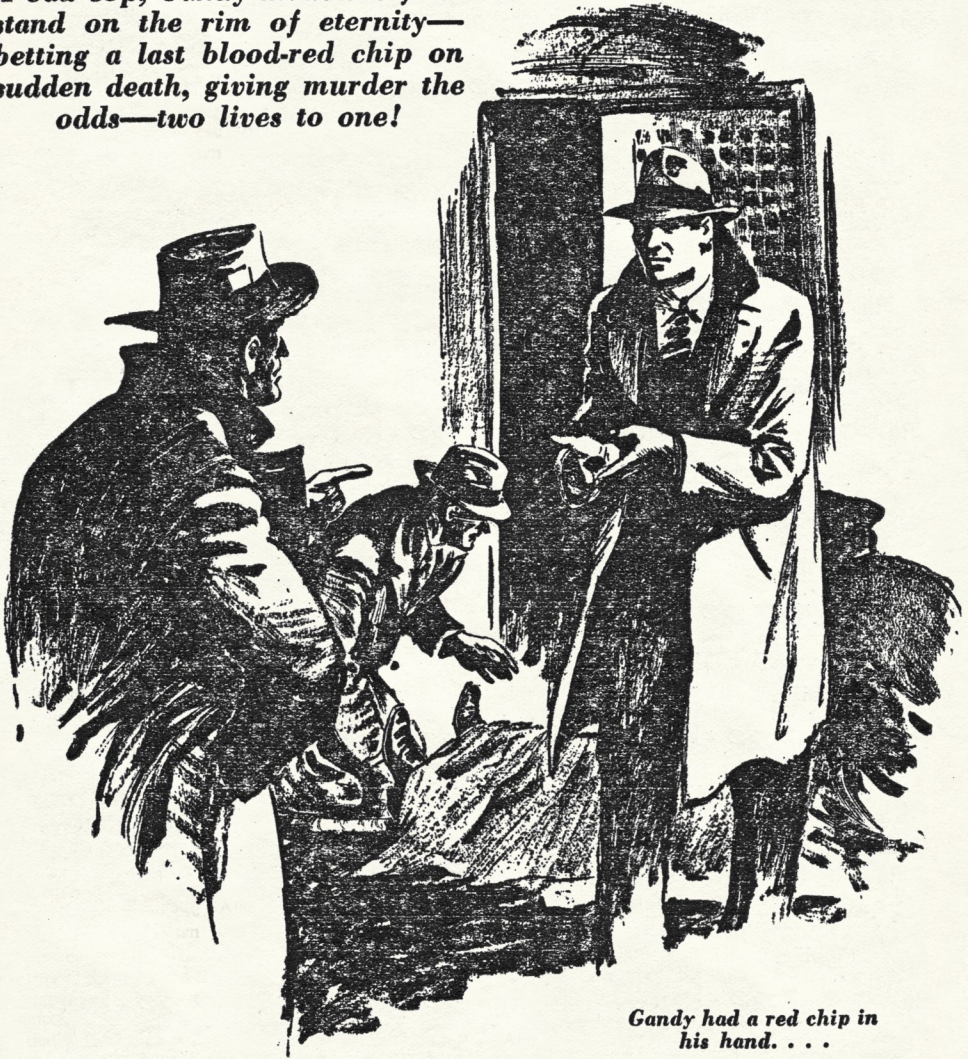
UNTIL after the Civil War, the laws of South Carolina were so constructed that a person was likely to be given a small fine for killing a slave—but might be hanged for stealing one.

—Webb B. Garrison

MURDER— DO NOT DISTURB

By Day Keene

A bad cop, Gandy made his final stand on the rim of eternity—betting a last blood-red chip on sudden death, giving murder the odds—two lives to one!



Gandy had a red chip in his hand. . . .

ONE of the sweepers discovered the body. It was lying in the sump of the freight elevator shaft when he came on duty at midnight. There was some

question of possible negligence on the part of the day elevator man, but none whatsoever concerning the identity of the man or the manner of his death.

The dead man was a rummy by the name of Allan V. Enklebee, who had formerly owned a half interest in a hear-aid company on the fifth floor. And he had obviously walked into the open shaft in a drunken stupor. You could smell the stuff ten feet away.

I phoned in what I had from a booth in the all night drug store next door, and Mike told me to go back and see if I could get enough to blow it up into a human interest yarn, as a quick check with the morgue showed that the 1941 runner-up in the Miss America strip-down had married a man by the name of Enklebee.

When I got back, the M.E. had made his examination and the body was lying on the tile in the lobby. Rick Ferris was there and sore because the young cop on the beat had called H.Q. instead of his station.

"If you're going to call H.Q. instead of your sergeant every time you find a stiff," Rick told him, "you're going to find yourself in serious trouble, son. We've more important things to do than check on drunks who fall down elevator shafts or walk into the sides of street cars."

Rick being a lieutenant, the young cop said he was sorry and it wouldn't ever happen again, but when the sweeper told him he'd found a dead man in the sump the first thing he'd thought of was murder.

Rick said, "Ha," and fingered through the stuff one of his boys had taken from Enklebee's pockets.

There wasn't much. A picture of a good looking girl and two kids, an outdated gasoline credit card, a paid up Legion card, sixty-four cents, and the red chip. It was a common red plastic poker chip.

Rick picked up the chip, then dropped it back on the little pile of personal possessions. "He should have cashed it in," Rick said.

He was still making a routine investigation when a prowler car rolled up in front and Sergeant Bill Gandy of the Fairfield

Avenue Station, whom the beat cop should have called in the first place, came in and wanted to know what gave.

"A D.O.A., accidental," Rick told him. "You can take it from here, Bill." He looked at the Legion card. "His name is Allan V. Enklebee of twenty-one forty-two Archer. They tell me he used to be a partner in the firm of Enklebee and Gorman on the fifth floor. I've been up there, but the office is locked. What Enklebee was doing in the building, I wouldn't know. But it seems fairly obvious he tried to walk down an open elevator shaft and the first step was a bit too big for him."

"Oh," Gandy said. He picked up the red chip and looked at it. "I know him. That is, I know the girl he married." He tied that in with what the city desk had given me. "She was a local beauty contest winner and got as high as the semi-finals in Atlantic City eight or nine years ago."

Rick got ready to leave. "Well, it's up to you to break the news to her. The guy was a rummy?"

Gandy nodded. "Bad. The last I heard, she'd left him, Gorman had kicked him out and he was pretty much on the rocks."

Nothing showed on the surface, but it was a fairly delicate situation. No man likes to be reminded of his own weakness. And Bill Gandy was a handy man with a jug himself. When he'd first come back from the Army, with a captain's rating in the C.I.D., he'd fairly burned up the Force. It had been even money for a while that when Rick Ferris was kicked up the ladder into the inspectorship long due him, Bill Gandy would get his job. But too much elbow bending had taken care of that. To my personal knowledge, none of the big brass were members of the W.C.T.U. All of them liked their *schnapps*. But they could take it or leave it alone. Seemingly Bill couldn't. And while they couldn't help but like and ad-

mire the guy, no matter how hot a ball of fire he was, they couldn't see their way clear to entrusting the H.Q. Squad to a man who, when he was most needed, might be found in the nearest gutter. After six trips to the carpet, Bill was lucky he still had a job.

"Well," Rick said. "He's yours."

He left, followed by his squad, and the wagon men wanted to know if it was okay to remove the body. Bill said it was. Then he saw me and wanted to know what I was doing there. I told him that because Mrs. Enklebee had been a former beauty contest winner, Mike had told me to stick around and see if I could get enough to blow the thing up into a human interest yarn.

A big, good looking devil in his early thirties, Bill's smile was wry as he lighted a cigarette. "Then stick around, Sammy," he said. "It could just be you can." He looked at the red chip again. "It could just be this wasn't an accident."

IT WAS an obvious suck to get his name in the paper by injecting a note of mystery into a run-of-the-mill accident. I didn't fall for it, but I stuck around. The building was run as most small office buildings are, with the night maintenance man handling the elevators. Bill talked to Kelly the maintenance man first. He said he knew Enklebee by sight and, shortly after eight o'clock, he had taken him up to the fifth floor in one of the passenger elevators. If he'd thought of him after that, he imagined he'd thought that Enklebee had walked down the fire stairs. "You know how it is with drunks, officer," he explained. "You get so you ain't surprised at nothing they do."

"Yes," Gandy said. "I know. He was drunk when you took him up?"

"I didn't pay much attention, Sergeant," Kelly admitted. "He must have been. Either that or he had a bottle in his pocket. He sure didn't get it from Mr.

Gorman. That's what him and Mr. Gorman used to fight about all the time. I mean, him drinking."

"Gorman was in the building then?"

Kelly repeated, "He must have been." He indicated his portable radio. "Kate Smith Calls was on when I took Mr. Gorman down. And she doesn't come on until nine."

"How about the freight elevator? I thought it was a rule in all buildings that elevators have to be grounded for the night. How come it was above the fifth floor?"

"Oh, that," Kelly said. "The insurance company on eight is moving up to nine, and the movers ast me could they use it and I said they could." He shook his head. "How come the doors on five were open though is more than I can tell you."

Gandy had him run us up to five and open the door of 504. There wasn't anything to see. It was just another office, with two desks, four filing cases, a half dozen display hearing aids on a glass shelf, and a big cut-away picture of a human ear. The sweepers hadn't gotten to the fifth floor yet, but there was no sign of disorder.

Bill tackled the movers on the eighth floor next. But along with moving, the insurance company had a crew of carpenters ripping out partitions and putting up new ones, and with the sawing and hammering going on, the crew on eight and nine couldn't have heard ten drunks screaming as they tumbled down the shaft. The freight elevator was in the back of the building in a semi-dark passageway, and you had to pass through a service door to get at it. Only a man who knew where it was could have found it.

"The way I see it," Kelly said, "Enklebee probably rang the front bell, and when I didn't hear it right away, he got impatient like drunks will and decided to run himself down in the freight elevator. When he saw the doors open he thought it

was on the floor, stepped in—and blooey.”

Bill Gandy nodded. “That could be just the way it happened.”

He examined the doors on five next. They were still open, and seemingly the automatic catch had jammed. He told Kelly he'd better fix them or put a barricade across the door. Then he had Kelly get him the home address of both the day freight elevator operator and Gorman from the records in the office of the building superintendent. I tagged along in the prowler car.

The day man's name was Moses. When he got the sleep out of his eyes he admitted he'd known the doors on five were stuck and had intended leaving a note for Kelly, but hadn't worried about it too much when he had forgotten to do so, as few of the firms on five ever had any freight, and then never at night. “When I did think of it,” he told Gandy, “I thought I'd tell the day man.”

Gandy's only comment was something to the effect that telling the day man about it was going to do Enklebee a hell of a lot of good.

Gorman was next on the list. I had more respect for the hearing aid business when I saw the type of a place he lived in.

A balding man in his middle forties, he didn't pretend to be shocked when Gandy informed him Enklebee was dead. He said, as a matter of fact, “With Allan

drinking as he was, it had to happen sooner or later. I'm only sorry for his widow. But maybe it's better this way. You say he fell down the freight shaft, eh?”

“That's right,” Gandy said.

Gorman tied the belt of his dressing gown. “And you want to question me. Well, that's only natural.” He got a bottle and three glasses. “You gentlemen will join me?”

I said I would be glad to. Gandy lighted a cigarette. “Thanks a million, fellow. But it so happens I'm on duty.”

He smoked while we had our drink. Then he got down to business. Gorman told a clean-cut story that checked with what Kelly had told us. He had been in his office, he said, checking some invoices and taking his monthly inventory, when Enklebee had staggered in shortly after eight o'clock and had begun to abuse him.

“In what way?” Gndy asked.

“Verbally,” Gorman said. “If it hadn't been so tragic it would have been funny. He called me a dirty crook, said I had stolen the business and kicked him out into the street, and at the same time tried to wheedle me into giving him a few dollars so he could buy another bottle.”

“You gave him some money?”

Gorman shook his head. “No. What good would it have done? He already had a bottle and about all he could carry. After all, there's a limit to what a man can put up with.” He lighted a cigarette. “Besides,



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although there is no legal obligation on my part, ever since I threw Enklebee out of the office about ten months ago, I have been dividing the net receipts with Mrs. Enklebee under a verbal agreement I made with her to give Enklebee a year in which to straighten up."

Gandy asked if Enklebee's death dissolved the agreement.

"I presume so," Gorman said. "It was both verbal and voluntary. Mrs. Enklebee is a young, good-looking woman. She will undoubtedly marry again." He poured himself another drink and moved the bottle over in front of me. "And I'll be damned if I'm going to support both her and a new husband."

"No," Gandy said. "That wouldn't be fair. But getting back to tonight. How long did Enklebee stay?"

GORMAN thought a moment. "I'd say twenty or thirty minutes, growing constantly more abusive. I finally had to tell him to get out or I'd throw him out. He called me a few more names and left, and I went on with my work. Naturally I thought he'd left the building. How the hell did he ever fall down the elevator shaft?"

"That," Gandy said, "is what I'm trying to find out. He was pretty bad off?"

"Pretty bad."

Gandy was a bugger for persistence. "Now tell me this, if you will, Mr. Gorman. Do you know if in these past nine or ten months Enklebee made any attempt to straighten up?"

Gorman shook his head. "That I wouldn't know. I doubt it. The few times I saw him, he'd been drinking. I do know he wasn't living at home. Mrs. Enklebee, too, had put up with all she could and Allan, I believe, was living in some Skid-Row hotel and following the usual pattern of washing dishes and selling a pint of blood now and then for money enough to get by."

Gandy considered the information. "Well, thanks," he said. "Now just one more question. You didn't by any chance happen to know that the freight doors on five were stuck, did you, Mr. Gorman?"

If I'd been Gorman, I'd have taken a poke at him. I thought for a moment he was going to. Then he took it in his stride. "No. I didn't, Officer. Believe me." He ran his palm over his bald spot. "I had only pity for Allan. And if I had realized he was so drunk he couldn't find his way back to the elevators, I'd have carried him down in my arms."

Gandy repeated, "Well, thanks," and we left.

Down in the prowler car again Bill sucked at his cigarette. Then he said, "Well, there's your human interest story, Sammy. As sure as a Higher Power is my judge, Gorman killed Enklebee."

I hooted at him. "Still gunning for Rick's job, eh?"

"No. Just stating a fact," he said.

"Give me a motive," I needed.

He meshed the prowler car into gear. "I'll do better than that. I'll take you over to see her."

The Widow Enklebee, I'd say, was twenty-eight or twenty-nine and looked a young eighteen. Having two kids hadn't hurt her figure. Tears and night cream and curlers and all, she was even better looking than her picture.

She took the bad news with her chin up. "Poor Allan," was all she said. "He tried so hard. And now to die like this." She laid a hand on Gandy's arm. "But if it had to be, I'm glad it was you who came to tell me, Bill."

One of her kids woke up and asked for a drink of water. She left the room to get it for him, and I said, "You seem to know the widow."

"Yes," Bill admitted, "I do. That is, I used to. In fact I used to know Rita very well." His smile was wryer than I'd ever seen it. "But that was way back in the

days when she was going to be Miss America and I was going to be commissioner of police."

"What came between you?" I asked.

He told me. "A bottle."

When she came back, he asked her about the verbal agreement with Gorman and she said, "Mr. Gorman has been very kind and understanding. I don't know what the children and I would have done if it hadn't been for him. I don't know what we'll do now."

He said, "You said 'he tried so hard.' Enklebee tried to straighten up?"

She lighted a cigarette, took two puffs and put it out. "Time after time. I don't know how much money we spent on sanitariums and cures. But none of them did any good. Although I was hopeful for a time after Allan got into A.A."

I asked, "A.A.?"

Gandy told me, "Alcoholics Anonymous."

Mrs. Enklebee continued. "But even they couldn't seem to help him. Allan didn't drink like a normal person. With him a bottle was a curse he just couldn't seem to overcome."

Gandy picked his hat from the sofa and wanted to know how she was fixed for cash. She said she had a little from the last check Mr. Gorman had sent, and that a small insurance policy of Enklebee's which she had managed to keep up against just such an eventuality would take care of her immediate needs.

I'd brought my camera from the prowler car. I asked if she minded if I took a few pictures. She wasn't enthusiastic about it, but she was too stunned to put up much of a kick. She let me snap her as she was without even bothering to fix her hair or wipe off the night cream. It made a hell of a good picture.

At the door, Gandy asked one more question, prefacing it by saying the answer could be important. "What kind of a man was Allan, Rita?"

She said, "Kind and generous, when he was sober."

Bill shook his head. "No. I mean was he honest with himself? Was he really trying to whip this thing?"

She thought a moment. Then she nodded. "I think so. In fact I'm certain he was."

"And how was he the last time you saw him? Was he sober or had he been drinking?"

She was wary. "Sober, I think. At least I didn't smell anything."

Gandy patted her arm. "I'll be back sometime tomorrow, kid. Meanwhile keep that chin up."

Back in the car I whistled. "You weren't woofing, were you? She can be my blonde motive anytime she chooses. No guy with all of his hormones could help but be crazy about her. And you think Gorman is?"

"What do you think?" he asked me.

I THOUGHT enough of it to ask him to stop at the next all-night bar we came to so I could call Mike. Mike listened to what I had to say, but refused to put the paper on record without something tangible to swing on. "Send in your pictures," he said, "and stick with Gandy. But all you really have now is the hunch of one rummy that the partner of another rummy scragged him so he could get to his wife. Get me a pinch," Mike concluded, "and I'll spread it all over the front page. But until then, as far as I'm concerned, it's just a stick on page four."

I said I'd see what I could do. The bar was on the fringe of the downtown district, not far from the office building. When I came out of the booth, Gandy was describing Enklebee to the barman. The barman placed him after a minute. "Yeah. I know the guy you mean. A nice guy when he's sober, but a lush if there ever was one. I finally had to ask him, as a

favor, to take his trade somewhere else." He mopped the wood. "Guys like him just queer it for guys who can handle the stuff."

Gandy asked if Enklebee had been in lately.

"Naw," the barman said. "In the first place I told him to stay out. In the second place it's progressive with those guys. He probably can't afford to drink in a good bar anymore, and he's lapping up smoke down on Skid Row." He brightened. "But why talk about something unpleasant? What'll you gents have, Sergeant? I'm buying."

"Thanks," Gandy beamed. "I'll have a coke."

I took a rye and short beer.

We made eight bars in a row after that, all of them on Skid Row near the hotel in which Enklebee had holed up after his wife had taken all she could. The story was the same in every bar. Enklebee had been drunk in all of them. All of the barmen knew him for a lush. But the barman in the last bar we went to best summed up the street's opinion.

"Don't never expect a lush to be grateful," he warned Gandy. "Six months off and on I cuffed that guy Enklebee for drinks. I nursed him through fifty hangovers. I let him cry on my shoulder." The barman was indignant. "But now he's got a pretty good job as a shipping clerk somewhere, does he drink in my bar anymore? No. He's too ritzy. He goes to some tony bar to spend his dough. I mean it. I ain't seen the lush in ten months."

Gandy asked him if Enklebee had anything on the books.

"No," the barman admitted. "I will say that for him. He stopped in and squared up his tab. But it's the principle of the thing. Now what will you gents have?"

"I'd reached my Plimsoll four bars back. I had a coke with Gandy. It was his turn to whistle as he pointed the prowl car

towards the morgue. The guy was happy.

"But I still don't see," I said, "how you knew the guy was on the wagon."

"You will, Sammy," he told me. "You will."

Rick was in the morgue, trying to hurry the post report on a gunshot case that had just come in. He looked at his watch when he saw Gandy. The hour hand was pushing four. "My lord, sergeant," he needled. "Don't tell me you're still working on that drunk who fell down that elevator shaft? You'd better lay off the stuff yourself before your brain goes completely wet."

Even the lobes of Gandy's ears turned red, but he fought his temper to a draw. "Yes. I'm still working on Enklebee," he said finally. "But I'm certainly not trying to override your accidental D.O.A., Lieutenant. It just so happens some information was available to me you didn't have access to."

With Rick it was strain. He'd earned the soft inspector's foam cushion that had been promised him as soon as the brass could find someone to fill his shoes. "I'm sorry," he apologized. "Forget I popped off, Bill. What's this stuff you have?"

Gandy told him. "Enklebee was dry and had been for at least ten months up until eight o'clock tonight."

Rick shook his head. "No. That I won't buy. The night maintenance man, the officer on the beat, two sweepers, three cab drivers, the guys in the drug store and even you yourself said he was rummy."

"He was," Gandy admitted. "But I know now that he was dry when he walked into that building last night. And if he had any booze in him it was poured down his throat before he was thrown down the shaft."

"Killed?" Rick asked. "Who'd want to kill the guy?"

"His former partner, Gorman."

"Why?"

"Gorman wants his wife, for one thing. For another, he made a verbal agreement,

thinking he'd never be called on it, to restore Enklebee to full partnership if he straightened up within a year. And while we haven't been to every bar in town, Sammy and I have been to nine of them. And we can't find a bar that's sold him a drink in ten months."

Rick sent the morgue attendant for the post on Enklebee. "His wife is worth killing a guy for?"

I gave him the 'Oh, you babe' whistle and Rick grinned at me.

The attendant came back with a copy of the post.

Looking at it, Rick said, "I'm afraid you lose, Bill. You can explain away the broken glass and booze on his clothes as a plant, but according to the lab's analysis of his stomach there wasn't anything in it but whiskey."

"In his stomach," Bill agreed. "But how about the blood stream absorption?"

Rick admitted, "It isn't on the sheet. But look, Bill. It stands to reason—"

Gandy got a little hot. "The hell it does! I say if there was booze in his stomach he was forced to drink at the point of a gun or it was poured down him in gulps. If that's the case and he was killed a few minutes later, there wouldn't have been time for his blood to absorb it." He pounded on the counter. "And I want a blood saturation test made or whatever the lab boys call it."

Rick got as hot as he did. "The hell you

say, Sergeant. Well, we'll just have the lab make one. And if this turns out to be just another bourbon dream of yours, I know a certain sergeant who's going to be back in uniform and walking a beat by tomorrow night. You still want a degree of saturation test made?"

His face white and lined with strain, Bill fingered the change in his pocket for a long moment. "Yeah. Sure," he said finally. "And I'll stand or fall on it."

THE hall was filled with the hush of early morning. Gorman wasn't so pleasant this time. His face was flushed. A lank of hair hid one eye.

"Now what?" he demanded.

"This is a pinch," Gandy said. "I'm taking you in for the murder of Enklebee."

Gorman tried to clear his head by shaking it. "The hell you say." He backed a few feet into the room. "Are you drunk or am I, Sergeant?"

I followed Bill Gandy in and leaned against the door jamb.

"Well," Gorman said, "let's have it." His laugh was as sour as his breath. "What makes you think I killed the rummy?"

"Rita for one thing," Gandy said. "She's very grateful to you. And gratitude is a powerful weapon in the hands of a smart man. 'Mrs. Enklebee is a young, good-looking, woman. She will undoubtedly marry again.' Remember?"

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Gorman wet his lips and dug his hands even deeper into the pockets of his dressing gown. "You amuse me."

"For another," Bill continued, "you hooked yourself when you promised to take Enklebee back if he straightened up within a year. That's what he came to see you about last night. To tell you he had ten months of good time in and was sure he was going to make it. And so were you. That's why you killed him. How did you do it, Gorman?" Force him to drink at the point of a gun?"

In the half light of dawn, Gorman's face became indistinguishable from the grey of his pajamas. "You're crazy!" he gasped.

Gandy shook his head. "No. The lab boys are never wrong. You drowned him in it, Gorman. His stomach and lungs were full of whiskey, but there wasn't enough alcohol in either his blood or his brain to make a canary tipsy."

I hardly had time to point the camera.

"Damn you!" Gorman screamed.

I heard the report of the gun and saw Gandy wince. Then he'd twisted the gun out of Gorman's hands and was beating him to his knees.

Rick ruined a peach of a second shot by pushing by me and asking Bill if he was okay.

"Yeah," Bill grinned. "I'm fine."

So saying he fell flat on his face, and didn't come to again until the H.Q. police surgeon was sewing up the hole in his shoulder in the Central Bureau squad room. Half of the brass in the city were standing around watching.

Mr. Big himself patted Bill's good arm. "You're okay, boy," he complimented. "Rick's told us all about it. And you did one smart piece of work."

Bill was modest. "Oh, not so smart."

"Still feeling kind of queasy, eh?"

"Yes," Bill admitted. "I am."

The Commissioner sent an inspector to get a bottle of his private stock. When it

came, he uncorked it and handed the bottle to Bill. "Take a big slug and you'll feel better, boy," he said.

"For you," Bill said. "Not for me." He handed him the bottle. "Thanks. Thanks a lot, Commissioner. But I don't use it anymore."

An embarrassed silence followed. The commissioner broke it by asking, "But how did you know in the first place that Enklebee was on the wagon, Gandy?"

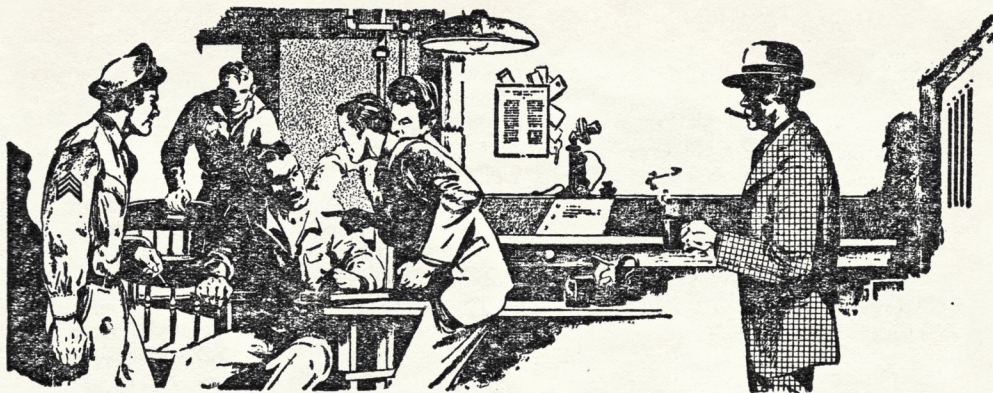
"By that red chip in his pocket," Bill told him. "Some groups, in fact quite a few groups, of Alcoholics Anonymous use what they call a chip system. When a lush comes in and wants to try to get on the program, they give him a white poker chip to keep with his change. It doesn't mean a thing except as a reminder. If he feels he has to take a drink, he's perfectly free to do so. All the group asks is that he break or throw away his chip. When he's been dry six months, he can turn his white chip in on a red one that's good for up to a year. And when Rita," color flooded his face, "I mean Enklebee's widow, told me he was trying and was capable of being honest with himself, I knew he wasn't fragrant with whiskey of his own free will when he took the dive down that shaft."

Rick's eyes narrowed slightly. "How did you know about that red chip business, Bill?"

Gandy dug in his pocket and held out a fist full of change. Among the quarters and nickles and dimes a red plastic poker chip gleamed almost as brightly as the Medal of Honor he'd brought back from the war. "Because I have one, too," he told Rick. "Why? Any objections?"

You'd have thought from the tone of Rick's voice that he'd just given birth to the guy. "Why, no. No, boy," he said. "I'm glad."

Then both him and the big brass made a grab for Bill's good hand. It made a hell of a picture.



THE THIRD DEGREE

By Hallack McCord

(Answers on page 53)

IF SUDDENLY faced with the need for solving a murder, arson case or other crime, how do you think you'd stack up? Pretty well? Here's your chance to test yourself and see what kind of detective you'd make. Below are listed twenty questions dealing with crime and investigation methods. If you can answer eighteen or more correctly, chances are you'd make a top-notch homicide sleuth. Answer sixteen or seventeen and you're good. But answer fourteen or fewer, and you land smack in the recruit-cop class. Good luck!

1. According to the underworld's way of talking, what kind of thief is a "heel?"

2. In crook slang, a "guy" is which of the following items: A dark lantern? A large safe? An insane murderer?

3. If an acquaintance of yours told you he was a "mob marker," which of the following jobs would you say he performed? Marked out places for the gang to rob? Informed on his gang? Specialized in running down criminal gangs?

4. True or false? "Maude C" is a mixture of morphine and cocaine.

5. If a crook acquaintance of yours said that he had just stolen a "prop," what item would you think he made off with?

6. In the terminology of the border agent, what is a "puller?"

7. True or false? In underworldese the term "stag" means detective.

8. If a crook acquaintance of yours told you he was looking for a "stir hound," which of the following would you think he was seeking: A prison bloodhound? A person who had spent much time in prison? A lawyer who hangs around jails?

9. How soon is a person likely to die after receiving a fatal dose of caustic ammonia?

10. Which of the following represents the best estimate as to the fatal dose of poison-

ous mushrooms: One mushroom? One-half pound of mushrooms?

11. True or false? A dose of adrenalin can kill a person with a weak heart.

12. True or false? Opium addicts sometimes develop neuralgia-like pains.

13. True or false? The person under the influence of marijuana is sometimes unable to judge the passage of time properly.

14. Can the scientific detective determine the difference between animal hair and human hair found at the scene of a crime?

15. Would it be possible for a six-foot man to commit suicide by hanging himself from a ring only three feet from the floor?

16. True or false? It virtually never occurs that persons who commit suicide by poisoning take poisons which are evil-smelling and evil tasting.

17. If it happens that a person who has already been buried becomes suspected of having been poisoned by arsenic, why should the soil under the coffin be examined?

18. What is meant when a burglar is said to be "going on the blind?"

19. What type of auto thief generally abandons the stolen car after taking it?

20. True or false? Firebugs, after setting a blaze, not infrequently divert suspicion from themselves by turning in the alarm.

FALL GUY

By John D. MacDonald

It didn't seem nice, after the party, for Carey to throw his host out the window and leave town without saying good-by. So he planned a return social, with himself as the corpse of honor—and a hot seat for whom it would fit!

THEN, out of nowhere, he was in a room and everybody was hollering and laughing. His hand hurt. He flexed it, that hand way out there on the end of his arm, an impossibly long arm, with the hand far away, hurting.

A heavy man was there against wall and floor, his fat legs spread, the way a kid will sleep with his back braced against the inside of a play pen.

"You chilled him, champ," somebody yelled out of the laughter, and he frowned hard, telling himself that you don't go around hitting old guys like that—old guys with grey hair. And it was dangerous hitting guys without tapes or gloves. You might bust the bones in your hand. Somebody yanked on his arm to turn him around and he went down onto one knee while somebody else was yelling a count on him. "Three—four—five—"

Carey came up off his knee into the fast shuffle he'd learned in the gym, trying to be quick and graceful, but his feet were lead and the funny thing was they kept coming too high up off the floor while they laughed some more. He wished they'd stop laughing. But the person who had yanked on his arm was a girl and the radio was blaring some sort of a Cuban thing.

Okay, so maybe they thought he couldn't dance to that kind of music. He held her right hand high, with his own

right hand lightly on her waist, feeling the moving warmth of her, doing it just right, stepping with the toe, then bringing the heel down.

He squinted at her. Her face moved around too much in the smoke. Finally he saw that she was big, almost fat you could say, and the blonde hair was all little curly things, like it had been carefully carved out of butter.

"Hey!" she yelled, "Fly right." And just then he came up against a wall with his shoulder, right near a window. He looked down at a funny pattern of moving lights and then he saw they were high, a window high over the city. The lights were car lights down there, and near the window it was cooler and he wanted to open it and stick his head out because maybe he was going to be sick.

The music stopped. "Fifty bucks they gave me," he said to the girl. It was important that she should know that they had given him fifty dollars. It took quite a man to make fifty dollars with his fists.

"You're a champ, chump," she said.

"Fifty dollars."

"Little man, you've told everybody that nineteen times. Give it a rest, huh?"

She was gone and he didn't see her go. And there was a glass in his hand. He wondered whether he had gone somewhere to get the glass or whether somebody had put it in his hand. He drank of it, not



*Midway on the terrace
there was a blinding
flash. . . .*

able to taste it, feeling it go down his throat like oil. He looked down and saw the triangular tear in his knee. It was the grey suit, the good one. When he bent over to inspect the damage, something happened to his balance and he was almost running before he could get his feet under him. His shoulder hit a thin man and nearly knocked him down.

The thin man's voice was acid clear. "I'd appreciate it if Linda would stop collecting clowns."

Some men were carrying the heavy man into what looked like a bathroom. His

head lolled limply on his big shoulders.

Carey was mad about the hole in his knee. The thin man had called him a clown. He went into his fighting stance, but he forgot the glass in his hand. The rest of the drink left the glass and hit him in the face. There was all that laughter again.

"Go sleep it off, champ," somebody said.

"Hey," a man said, "we put Charlie in the bathtub and Sally took the flowers out of the bedroom and put 'em on his chest. He looks peaceful."

Carey shut his eyes for a moment. That wasn't good. The room and the voices picked up speed and went around and around, as though he was in the middle of a big phonograph record. The voices were near and far, going *zum, zum* in his ears, and he opened his eyes as he started to fall, catching himself, wondering when he'd be sick.

The music was slow and languid. Carey squinted across the room and saw the big chair with nobody in it. He moved carefully and slowly, knowing that if he got turned around or took his eyes off the chair, he'd never be able to find it again. A couple dancing bumped into him, but he kept watching the chair. He fell into it and closed his eyes. But things started going around again. He had to open his eyes just a little, and to do that he had to pull his mouth down to keep his eyes stretched open.

Then he opened his eyes, not remembering when he had shut them, and the room was quiet. His face and his hair were wet and so was the front of the grey suit. The room was quiet. He saw the pitcher in the thin man's hand, the man with the acid voice.

"Hey," Carey said weakly.

There were three others and they were looking at him, the four of them standing in a half circle around the chair. The thin one, the fat blonde girl, a stocky, muscular man and a small girl. He hadn't seen the small girl before. Her hair was piled high in dark soft ringlets and her dress was a strapless silver sheath emphasizing the slimness of her waist. Her mouth looked soft. Carey smiled at her.

"He's hopeless," the thin man said with disgust.

"Shut up, George," the fat blonde said. "He's okay. You're okay, aren't you, Carey."

"Sure. I got fifty bucks tonight for—"

"He says that one more time and I bust him with this pitcher," thin George said.

The small girl had a worried look. The stocky man leaned forward. Carey felt himself lifted and set on his feet. He wanted to hit the stocky man. But Carey's left leg had gone to sleep. It bent under him and he caught his balance, slapping the sole of his shoe against the floor. His foot was full of needles. He felt better, more solid on his feet than before he went to sleep.

"Where's everybody?" Carey asked.

"We got 'em out of here, champ," the stocky one said. Carey didn't like his face. It was square and his mouth had a nasty twist.

The small girl said, "Please try to wake up."

"I'm awake," Carey mumbled. "I didn't see you before. Who are you?"

"Never mind," thin George said.

"I'm Jean," the girl said. "I'm your friend, Carey."

Carey looked at her gratefully. She was a nice friend to have. He liked that type. Little and sweet, but you could see there wasn't anything dumb about her.

"Slap him a little, Andy," thin George said to the stocky man.

CAREY'S ears rung with the pistol slaps on his cheeks. These dopes didn't know who he was, probably. He jabbed with the good old left and crossed with the right. Andy wasn't there. He was inside the right and his fist thumping Carey's stomach sickened him. He coughed.

"Listen, champ," the fat blonde said.

"Shut up, Sally," George said. "I'll tell him. Champ, is your head working right?"

"Sure."

"It has to be, because you got thinking to do. You hit Charlie Vannis. Do you remember that?"

Carey frowned. "There was a fat man, an old guy. . . ."

"That's right. Charlie Vannis. Listen, champ. You killed him. He's dead."

"Dead?" Carey Thomas repeated stupidly.

"Right. Some jokers put him in the bathtub. He was breathing then. Then somebody tried to wake him up and found he wasn't breathing any more. Maybe you busted his skull. You hit him hard."

Carey pressed his fists against his cheekbones and shut his eyes hard. "I got to think."

"We talked it over, kid," Andy said. "I was for calling the cops. But it was sort of our fault. We added you to our party after the fight and got you loaded on our liquor and brought you up here to Charlie's apartment. It wouldn't be a fair shake to toss you to the cops now, would it? Any guy ought to have a chance to get out of a rap like this."

"I got to think," Carey said.

"We'll help you in that department," Sally said. "We've got it figured. He hasn't been dead long. Those French doors there open onto the terrace. We'll all leave. Then all you have to do is lug him out onto the terrace and toss him over. It's thirty stories right down to the street. They'll call it an accident. That will get you in the clear. See, we're your friends."

"I didn't mean to kill him," Carey said.

George shrugged. "Go to the cops if you want to, kid. Here you are, a strong young kid. How old are you?"

"Twenty-four."

"And you go one-eighty. How's it going to look? Charlie was fifty-three and soaking wet he'd weigh maybe one-sixty. How is that going to sound in court and in the newspapers? My guess is that they'll label it murder and fry you, kid. It's happened, you know. And there was a lot of witnesses."

"Why did I hit him?"

"How the hell do we know?" Sally snapped. "What do you want to do? Plead self-defense?"

George's tone was wheedling. "Come on, kid. Be smart. We're leaving now,

the three of us. You'll be alone here with the body. Will you do it?"

Carey looked at the small girl. Her eyes held a shadowed look. "I guess I got to," he said. The dark girl turned away before he could read her expression.

He stood and watched them go out. First the two girls, then Andy, the stocky one. George was last. He wore a homburg and he was putting on lemon-yellow gloves. He turned at the door and said, "Give us ten minutes to get away from here, kid, and then do it fast. The longer he'd dead, the more chance of their showing the fall didn't do it."

Carey Thomas was alone in the apartment. He was dried out. He went over to the bar and found a bowl of water with the last few small pieces of ice floating in it. He lifted it with unsteady hands and put it to his lips. He drank, feeling the chillness flood into his stomach. He paused, sobbing for air, then finished the bowl.

He moved cautiously to one side to where he could see into the bathroom. He could not see the body. His breathing was shallow, his hands tight clenched. He walked closer. A full-length mirror was set into the bathroom door. He saw himself move into view, tall, with wide sloping shoulders, lean-flanked. There was a purple bruise under his eye. His brown hair and the front of his grey suit were damp, and through the triangular tear in his trouser leg he could see the skinned knee.

The apartment was very still. Standing there, he could hear the muted hum of the refrigerator, distant traffic sounds, a far away radio program.

Charlie Vannis was in the tub. He had the look of death—waxed skin, clothes looking as though they were stuffed heavily with sand. His mouth was bruised and badly discolored. Carey Thomas rubbed his hands on his pants. He didn't want to touch the body. As yet he couldn't

thing clearly. Ten minutes had gone by. He went into the long living room again, opened the French doors. The night was still and cold. He walked over to the edge of the low concrete railing and looked over. One car was cruising by, far below. Carey shivered. He did not see how he could throw a body over into the night, to go down, turning slowly, to smash against the pavement. The only way to see was to get the body out here on the terrace.

Charlie Vannis, in death, weighed a thousand pounds. Cringing from the touch of him, Carey managed, heaving and sweating, to get him out of the tub onto the floor. And he could find no way to pick him up. He felt helpless and alone. He got the body by the armpits and sat it, like a fat rag doll, on the edge of the tub. He held it there, bent and got his shoulder into the middle of it and let it fall forward. He hitched it back a little, his right arm around the legs, then stood up. A dead hand swung against him. It swung with each slow, labored step he took, tapping him lightly. He went through the French doors and across the terrace.

Midway on the terrace there was a blinding flash that stung his eyes. He waited instinctively for thunder, then looked up and saw the star-filled sky. The flash had seemed to come from his left. He looked over and saw, thirty feet away, a neighboring terrace. It was dark and empty. He stood with the body on his shoulder, his thighs pressing against the wall. One quick heave. He could not do it. He backed away from the wall, tried to lower the body gently. It got out of control and dropped hard onto the cement.

Carey Thomas fled. He found the self-service elevator with the door open while he was looking for the stairs. He pulled the door shut and pushed the button labeled GF. Halfway down he started thinking about who might be on the ground floor. A desk clerk? A doorman? He

could not remember coming into the apartment. He could remember coming out of the dressing room with the five tens crisp in his wallet after knocking out Baker in the fourth round, and remember the crowd of people who had asked him to join them. Then there had been a restaurant and a bar. A second bar. Then the fog over his mind and the nothingness until he remembered standing there with his hand hurting, Vannis on the floor in front of him, propped against the wall.

He came cautiously out of the elevator. A night light glowed behind a low counter, but no one was in sight. He moved across to the glass doors opening onto the street. When he was certain that the sidewalk was deserted, he pushed the door open and slid out. The street was too brightly lighted for comfort. He kept close to the blonde stone apartment building, moving rapidly. He guessed that he was somewhere on the west side, near the boulevards.

A couple was walking toward him, a half block away. He decided that it would be best to cross the street. It happened then, a sound as though a wet mop, with a full arm swing, had been slapped against a boulder. The sound filled the world. The dark shape struck the sidewalk midway between him and the oncoming couple, bounced a full six inches into the air and lay still, nauseatingly flattened and distorted.

The approaching woman screamed, and continued to scream after every harsh intake of breath. Carey Thomas found himself running diagonally across the wide street, his feet stinging as his shoe soles slapped the pavement. He turned at the next corner and kept running. Behind him the screams grew more faint. When he saw oncoming headlights, he skidded to a stop and flattened himself against a shallow store front. When the car had passed, he went on at a fast walk. Far down the next side street he saw yellow neon that

announced, flashing on and off: BAR AND GRILL. Carey Thomas wanted people around him. Normal, unexcited people. He was glad the place was dimly lighted inside. The bar stools were crowded. The brightest lights were over the shuffleboard, where two sailors and their girls were playing with grim intensity. The weights clicked metallically, thumped off the end of the board.

"Beer," said Carey in as calm a tone as he could manage.

He had taken his first sip when everyone in the place lifted their heads and listened to the growing wail and whine of sirens, the hunter's cry in the city jungle. The sound became crescendo, then diminished and came to an audible stop not far away. A few of the younger customers finished their drinks with a gulp and left to find out what was happening. The group who left vacated some of the stools. Carey slid onto one. He did not have the faintest idea of what to do next.

After a time he became conscious of the girl on the neighboring stool. She seemed to be alone, and she kept turning and giving him an inquisitive stare, half smiling.

"Hello," she said.

"Hello to you."

She looked at his suit. "Don't tell me it's raining out."

"I spilled a drink."

"Oh." She was a thin-faced blonde with

a transparent skin and colorless eyebrows and lashes. She looked anemic.

He moved his stool closer to her, lowered his voice. "I got to get myself a place to stay tonight," he said. "Know where I can get a room? And I don't want to register."

"Maybe I know and maybe I don't know."

Under the edge of the bar he opened his wallet. He showed her one ten and she shook her head. He added another to it and she hesitated, shook her head again.

"Skip it then," he said.

"Okay, I do know a place," she whispered to him. In a few minutes she left, alone. She was waiting when he got down to the corner.

HE WOKE up, opened his eyes and looked at an unfamiliar ceiling.

It startled him. He sat up, saw his clothes neatly folded on a nearby chair. The room was small, and outside the window was the iron outline of a fire escape. He smelled coffee. Suddenly the events of the previous night came back to him in a vast, confused rush. And the fear came with it, fear as tangible as a soundless presence behind him, as real as a gun aimed at his head.

He stood up beside the bed and saw that his trousers were gone. He padded to the doorway, saw the anemic blonde girl sitting by a coffeepot on an electric plate

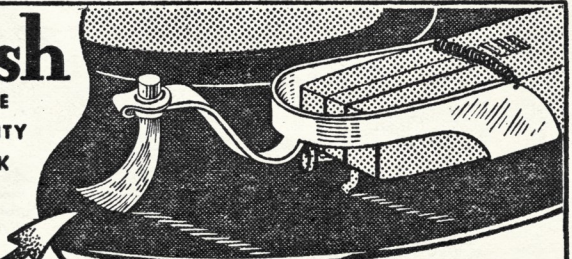
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mending the rip in the knee of his trousers.

She looked up. "A weaver can take out these stitches and do it right. It won't show much. I'll be done in a minute."

He went back in and sat on the edge of the bed. "Where did you sleep?" he asked.

"Out here on the couch. Brother, you were bushed! I never thought you'd make it to the bed. Are you hot?"

"How's that?"

"Who's looking for you? Wife, police?"

"Skip it."

"I was just asking, Carey."

"Did I tell you my name?"

"Your driver's license did."

"Look, honey. When you finish, how about getting a morning paper?"

"My name's Doris. I got it already."

She came to the doorway, threw the trousers to him. "Did you read it?" he asked.

"I read it. Why?"

"Bring it in here."

"Dress yourself and come get it, Carey. You can walk."

He went out and picked up the paper. His eyes slipped by the big scare headlines down to the body of the front page story.

Charles Francis Vannis, 53, ex-real estate broker and rumored silent partner of George Lyne, local racketeer, was killed instantly at 1 A. M. this morning when he fell or jumped from the terrace of his west side apartment, thirty stories above Mailen Boulevard. The body was taken, at the direction of Police Captain Paul Jones, to the city morgue for examination. It is reported that earlier in the evening there was a party in progress at the Vannis apartment, but it is believed that at the time of death the deceased was alone. Police are seeking all those who were guests at the party. The deceased is survived by his estranged wife, Mildred French Vannis, now living on the West Coast with her daughter, Frances, age fifteen.

Adjoining the story was a cut showing a picture of that section of Mailen Boulevard, evidently taken when the apartment building was first opened. A dotted line

had been drawn from the terrace down to an X on the sidewalk.

"Some party, hey?" Doris said.

He glared at her. "What the hell do you mean?"

"Brother, if you're on the run, you got a lot to learn. You ought to get the name Vannis tattooed across your forehead. Those sirens came pretty soon after you walked into Indio's last night."

She poured him a cup of coffee. There were tired lines in her face that hadn't shown up in the dim light of the bar and grill.

She looked at him. "You ought to shave and comb your hair. I've got some stuff here."

Carey took the shaving kit into the tiny bathroom. As he was shaving, she came and leaned against the door frame, her arms crossed. "What are you going to do?" she asked.

"About what?"

"Don't be such a dope, Carey. You look bright enough."

A buzzer sounded. The girl gave him a startled look, pulled the bathroom door shut. Carey finished the last two strokes, splashed water on his face, towed himself dry and put his ear against the door. Doris was talking to another woman. Their voices went shrill in anger, and then there was a hard slap and a soft moan. The bathroom door was pushed open suddenly and the fat blonde named Sally stood there, her face mottled with anger, her hands on her hips. "Good morning, Glory," she said.

Carey pushed woodenly by her. Doris sat on a straight chair, bright red finger-marks on her cheek. Sally followed into the room. "That little floozy tried to brush me off," she said.

"How did you find me?" Carey asked wearily.

"That wasn't hard. The streets were empty. Andy guessed you'd duck into a joint. There are three in the area. We

did a little research. This girl is well known at Indio's, and you matched the description we gave the bartender. He just happened to have her address."

"What do you want?"

Sally turned to Doris. "Go on in the bedroom, dearie, and close the door."

Doris did as she was told. Sally snapped open her shoulderbag, reached in and pulled out a large glossy picture. She smiled at Carey and handed it to him.

It was like being hit low. The breath whuffed out of him. There was no mistaking him, or the body he carried. He held it so tightly the corner crumpled.

"What's this for?" he asked.

She shrugged. "Insurance. George Lyne is an amateur photographer. He wanted evidence in case you tried to cross us up. He has the next apartment, and he took the picture from his terrace."

"Then he—I didn't throw the body over!"

"Wasn't it nice that we did, Carey?" she asked. He decided that her upturned nose gave her somewhat the look of a pink pig.

"Okay, so you got the picture. Why did you come here?"

"Because George couldn't get to some of the witnesses and shut them up about the way you slugged Vannis. And he decided that you better run for it."

"Oh, he decided?"

"That's right. Here." She handed him a slim packet of bills, folded once. The visible bill was a fifty. He took it.

"That's five hundred, Carey. And you're to stay clear of the bus stations and the railroad stations and the airports. You can be picked up too easily there. Don't go back to your own room. That will be covered. We think hitchhiking might be best."

"And suppose I don't run?"

"Then a copy of this picture will be mailed to the police. You can guess what will happen then. You can't prove that he

was dead when you carried him out there."

"I . . . tell George I'll make a run for it."

She patted his cheek lightly. "Now you're being smart, darling. Good luck."

She shut the outside door quietly.

He let Doris out of the bedroom. Later, while she was in the bathroom, he slipped one of the fifties into her cracked leather purse. He put his coat on and left.

On the sidewalk, he felt naked and alone. The thing was too big and too confusing to be thought out. And a running man can't think. Everything seemed to be prodding him, keeping him on the move.

A half block from Doris' cheap apartment, heels tapped up beside him. It was a down-at-the-heels section of small fruit stands, cigar stores, candy stores. He looked down into the small dark-haired girl's face. She was wearing a tailored dark suit, a saucy black hat and very high heels. Her lips were tightly compressed.

"All right," he said. "Why don't you leave me alone?"

"Please. Be still and listen. There's a big chance they may be watching you. Don't run, Carey."

"It's the only thing I can do. You know that."

"You mustn't run. I can't prove to you right now how important that is."

"Oh, fine. I go turn myself in and then try to explain that photograph to the cops."

"Photograph?"

"Don't play dumb. The one George Lyne took of me carrying Vannis' body across the terrace."

She gave him a puzzled look. "But you didn't do it. You didn't throw him over the edge."

"How would you know that?"

"You came down and went out before he went over the edge."

"Even if I could prove that, it wouldn't do me any good. I killed the guy, didn't I?"

"Please, Carey. Give me a chance. I can't stay with you any longer. Meet me at one o'clock."

"Sure. Stay around town and be picked up."

"There are morning movies. Go to one of them. Look, go to the Empire on Center Street. Sit in the first row in the balcony, as near the middle as you can get. I'll join you there. Please, Carey."

The idea of the darkness of a movie was comforting. "Okay," he said.

She touched his arm lightly and was gone. He did not look around.

HE SAT in the darkness, not hearing the words of the sound track, looking at the screen but not seeing the action.

At noon he had an idea. He left the theater quickly, found a restaurant up the street where he could sit and watch the front of the Empire through the window.

At twelve-forty, the two prowling cars came up and parked directly in front. The uniformed policemen piled out and hurried into the theater. Carey Thomas paid his check, took a toothpick as he waited for his change, stepped out onto the street and walked away from the Empire, his stride casual and relaxed.

When he reached the precinct station, he did not falter. He went up the steps, pushed the door open, and walked to the high desk.

"Yes, mister?"

"I'm Carey Thomas."

"What can I do for you Mister— Oh! Hey, Joe! Hold this guy while I give 'em a buzz downtown. They want him on the Vannis thing."

"You don't have to hold me," Carey said.

Captain Paul Jones, a stocky man with a sully face, paced back and forth while Carey Thomas gave his story. The stenotype machine clicked busily, putting his

words in zigzag pattern on the white tape.

"... and, I guess that's all," Carey said.

Jones stopped in front of him and crossed his beefy arms. "Some questions, Thomas. Why did you hit Vannis?"

"I don't know. I was out on my feet at the time I did."

Jones looked grim. "And here is the sixty-four dollar question, Thomas. Why did you turn yourself in like this? You must know that you haven't got a leg to stand on."

"I think I have. They were pushing me around, arguing me into things. I'm not very bright, Captain, but it looked like they were taking too much trouble with me. And they went too far, showing me that picture."

"How do you mean?"

"A picture like that is going to show where it was taken from. And if that blonde named Sally didn't lie to me, it was taken from the terrace of Lyne's apartment, and that can be proved. I can't prove Vannis was dead when I carried him out there. Neither can the person that took that picture. I don't know anything about the law, but it would seem to me that anybody standing around taking a picture like that would be guilty of something."

"Guilty of what?"

"I don't know. But why be so anxious to toss the guy off a building unless you want to cover up something? I don't know. Maybe I did wrong, but they seemed to be trying to get me to run for it or to get me in wrong somehow. And the only way I could think to cross them up was to come in here."

Jones went out and came back. "Okay, Thomas. We're picking up George Lyne, Sally Karizeck and Andrew Krame. We'll see how it checks out."

"How about that girl named Jean? Why not her too?"

"We don't need her yet, Thomas."

Carey Thomas sat and watched George

Lyne in Captain Paul Jones' office. Jones gave a brief outline of Carey's story. George Lyne's eyebrows climbed higher and higher. Then he gave an incredulous laugh. He tapped a cigarette on his thumb-nail and lit it.

"Who's writing your scripts, Captain?"

"You have a version of what happened?" Jones asked politely.

"I know what happened. It was a pretty rough party. The slugger here unwound on Vannis and knocked him out. Some jokers put Vannis in the bathtub. Later on, the party broke up. Slugger here, was asleep on a chair. I left with my friends just as Vannis came staggering out of the bathroom. He looked sore. I didn't want to be mixed up in any trouble, so I left. The last thing I saw was Vannis yanking the slugger awake." He shrugged. "Maybe they had another brawl. I don't know. The next thing I knew was that I heard sirens."

"Who was with you at that time?"

"Andy and Sally. Jean had gone home."

"Then Vannis was alive when you left the apartment."

"He was walking around, whatever that means."

Jones turned to the notes on his desk. "Your story matches perfectly with the stories I got from Karizeck and Krame. Do you have any theories, Mr. Lyne?"

Lyne shrugged again, leaned over and rubbed out his cigarette on the office floor. "Vannis got rough with the kid here and the kid hit him too hard. Probably killed him. So he dumped him over the edge of the terrace and ran for it. This crazy story of his is supposed to confuse everybody."

Jones pushed the switch on his desk box. "Crandall? Get the Karizeck woman and Krame in here. And send somebody in with a gun on 'em. Then have Storey and Lewisohn report to me."

Sally came in, smiling and confident, followed by Andy. She gave Carey a

small, bitter smile. Jones told them where to sit. A uniformed patrolman came in. Jones directed him to stand near the door.

Jean came in. She gave Carey a quick smile. He glared at her, remembering the trap that she had set. A small, tired-looking man in a dark blue suit came in with her.

"Chin up, kid," Lyne said to Jean, smiling.

Jean stood in front of Jones' desk. Captain Jones said, "Detective Storey, on what day were you sworn in and assigned to cover George Lyne?"

"November eleventh, 1948, over a year ago," Jean said in a low voice.

"What goes on here?" Lyne snarled.

"Shut up, Lyne. Were you able to gain Lyne's confidence?"

"Yes, sir. For the past three months, ever since I showed him that 'wanted' poster that you prepared for me, he has taken me into his confidence. He obviously has felt that the false wanted notice gives him some hold over me."

"What has been the relationship between Lyne and Vannis?"

"There has been trouble between them lately. Lyne has complained that Vannis has been drawing too big a share of the take without contributing to it."

"What did you report to me ten days ago?"

"That, if Lyne found a good opportunity, he would undoubtedly try to kill Vannis, as Vannis was no longer of use to him."

"Was Vannis alive when you left the apartment?"

Jean glanced at Lyne. "Yes sir, he was."

Lyne had an incredulous look on his face. "Eh?"

"What happened next, Storey?"

"I went down in the elevator. In accordance with the phone call I had placed, Detective Lewisohn was in front, driving the taxi. I got in. We went a hundred

feet down the street and parked with the lights off. Twelve minutes after I left, Carey Thomas came out. Thirty seconds after he came out of the apartment building, Vannis' body hit the sidewalk twenty-five or thirty feet in front of him."

"Let me get this straight," Jones said mildly. "If Thomas was on the sidewalk, he couldn't very well have thrown Vannis off the terrace, could he?"

"No, sir."

"And all the witnesses have testified that Vannis was alive when you all left the apartment."

"She's lying," Lyne said bitterly. "Vannis was as dead as a mackerel. The back of his head was like jelly when—"

He stopped abruptly. His mouth opened and closed twice, without sound.

Then he began to speak quickly. "The champ hit him and Vannis hit the wall. It killed him."

"Carey Thomas hit him," Jean said. "I saw that. And I found a chance to look at Vannis closely after he was hit. His head hit the wall without much force. In fact, he seemed on the verge of regaining consciousness. Then he was carried into the bathroom. Thomas did not go into the bathroom. You did. You told us that Vannis was dead. I didn't see him. So I have to testify that he was alive, as far as I know, when I left the apartment."

Jones sighed. "It's still confusing, but I'm satisfied that we have enough to go on to place a murder charge against Lyne, Karizeck and Krame."

"I did what they told me," Sally said quickly. "Leave me out of this."

"Shut up, you fool!" Lyne screamed.

"Shut up yourself, George," Andy said. "I ran the water loud to drown the noise and you were the one banged his head on the edge of the tub. Trouble was, you had to bang it four times before you did the job. You know that would show in a medical examination, so then you dreamed up the deal of making the punk throw him off

the building. Only the punk didn't do it, and you had to do it yourself because I wouldn't."

JEAN came out into the waiting room. "The Captain wants to see you again, Mr. Thomas." Her voice was completely cold.

He followed her straight back into the office.

Paul Jones yawned. "I suppose you know you were a damn fool?"

"You don't have to tell me that."

"You got sodden drunk and got in a jam. How much education have you had?"

"High school."

"Have any military?"

"Two years Navy. Why?"

"Detective Storey has brought up the matter of how you handled yourself after you got into the jam. It indicates that basically you're an honest person."

"Thank you," he said bitterly.

"And you used your head. They underrated you."

"Is that all?"

"You can go on trying to be a boxer. You've got a punch, and that's all. In four years you'll look like a relief map of the panhandle. Detective Storey has pointed out that there are four vacancies in rookie training."

"Listen, I don't want—"

"Think it over. Let me know in the morning."

As he stood out on the sidewalk, the anger slowly drained out of Carey. He flipped his cigarette into the gutter. Two cops came out of headquarters. Carey looked at them speculatively.

Jean said, at his elbow, "All right. I'm sorry. It was just an idea."

He looked at her. His grin was slow in coming. "You do eat, don't you? Come on. You can tell me how rough it will be, while I get my strength back."

She took his arm as though it was something she had been doing all her life.



ANSWERS TO THE THIRD DEGREE

(Questions on page 41)

1. According to the underworld's way of talking, any petty thief is known as a "heel."

2. In crook slang, a "guy" is a dark lantern.

3. A "mob marker" marks out places for his gang to rob.

4. True. "Maude C." is an underworld term used in reference to a mixture of cocaine and morphine.

5. If your crook acquaintance said he had just made off with a "prop" you should know he had just stolen a stickpin.

6. In the terminology of the border agent, a "puller" is one who attempts to smuggle liquor across the border.

7. True. In underworld slang, "stag" means detective.

8. If a crook acquaintance of yours told you he was looking for a "stir hound," he would mean he was seeking a lawyer of the type who hangs around jails and prisons to pick up business.

9. A person generally dies four minutes or more after receiving a fatal dose of caustic ammonia.

10. It is generally quite uncertain as to exactly what constitutes a fatal dose of poisonous mushrooms.

11. True. An administration of adrenalin can kill a person with a weak heart.

12. True. Opium addicts sometimes develop neuralgia-like muscular pains. They gen-

erally try to alleviate these pains with increasingly larger doses of opium (that is, the specific derivative used).

13. True. Persons under the influence of marijuana often have difficulty judging the passage of time correctly.

14. Yes, the scientific detective can frequently determine the difference between human and animal hair.

15. Yes, it would be possible for a six-foot man to hang himself from a ring in the wall only three feet above the floor. The feet do not have to leave the floor for a person to be killed by hanging.

16. False. Persons who kill themselves by poison not infrequently take poisons which are evil-smelling and evil-tasting. For obvious reasons, however, this is not true of persons who are murder victims.

17. Arsenic has been known to leave the body in the process of decomposition, infiltrating into the coffin and the ground below it.

18. When a burglar "goes on the blind," he goes out to rob without having a specific place in mind.

19. The youthful joyrider generally abandons his stolen auto a short time after taking it.

20. True. Firebugs, after setting a blaze, not too infrequently divert suspicion from themselves by turning in the alarm, aiding firemen, and so forth.

— DEATH IS

A nameless corpse in a forgotten alley, hard by the street of shattered hopes—a corpse with 75 grand mad money and a final message to his heirs—"You're as bad as the living—and as good as dead!"



A Novel by William Campbell Gault

MY SHADOW

A hand like a mallet caught him flush in the mouth. . . .



CHAPTER ONE

Whose Body?

THE door to the street was open at Heeney's that night, and Heeney himself was behind the bar. Joe took his usual stool and ordered his usual drink, which was rye.

Heeney said, "It's spring, Joe. That should be worth a smile."

"I've been smiling all winter," Joe said.

"You should have stayed with the Department," Heeney said.

"No, I shouldn't have stayed with the department," Joe said. "And I shouldn't have opened the office. I should have got-

ten a nice, clean job in a warm factory."

"You wouldn't make much money there," Heeney offered.

From the shadows at the far end of the bar a voice said, "Money, money..."

Joe looked that way, and then back at Heeney. "Who's that? Is that Ped?"

"It's Ped," Heeney agreed. "And drunker even than usual."

"Dazed," Ped said, "and perhaps even stupefied, but not drunk. Is that Joe Keller up there?"

"Right," Joe said. "Come on out of the shadows, Ped, and let me buy you a drink."

The man who answered this irresistible summons was a thin and fairly tall man with a shock of dirty-white, stiff hair and eyes of a blue so brilliant that years of incessant drinking had failed to dull them. His clothes were glazed with dirt; his walk was an alcoholic's shuffle.

"Something good," he said, "just for tonight, Joe. Something in a bond."

Joe nodded, and held a ten dollar bill aloft. "My last in the world. We'll kill it together, Ped."

At the word "kill," Ped seemed to shudder.

Heeney said, "You're kidding, Joe. Things can't be that bad."

"When I left the department, nine months ago," Joe said, "I had four thousand fish salted, Heeney. This is the last of it, right here in my hand."

The phone rang at the back of the room, and Heeney went to answer it.

Ped's hand was on Joe's arm. "Before we get drunk, Joe, I want you to go with me. I want to show you something."

Joe could sense the man's urgency, could feel Ped's hand trembling.

"One drink first, Ped," he said. "I need it."

"And I," Ped said.

Heeney came back and they had the drink, and then Joe said, "I'm going out with Ped for a while, but we'll be back."

They went out together, and at the curb, Ped said, "We'd better take your car. It's quite a way from here."

Joe indicated his battered Chev, and Ped climbed in, while Joe went around to climb behind the wheel.

"You were talking about money," Ped said, "in there. I'll show you some money. Lots of it." His voice was tight. He nodded. "I live over on 13th, near Broad."

Joe swung the coupe in a U turn and headed back toward Broad. Maybe Ped was drunker than he seemed, but that wouldn't explain the man's tension.

On Ninth, they waited for a light to change, and Joe looked over to see Ped's lips moving soundlessly. Joe looked away, again. Ped's background was obscure, but Joe knew it must have included a fair education, and a wife whom he'd mentioned rarely. Joe stopped the Chev in front of an ancient frame building, weather-worn but still solid.

"We'll go around in back, first," Ped said.

A narrow walk skirted the building at its southern edge, and Joe followed the other man along this until they came to a back yard, fenced on two sides, its rear open to the alley.

"This way," Ped said, and headed toward the northwest corner of the house. Joe followed.

There were steps leading down to the basement, but no door at the lower end. The wall was solid brick and had obviously taken the place of the former wide cellar entrance.

Ped beckoned for him to go down, and Joe had a moment's uneasiness before moving down the steps. Then, in the dimness, he made out the figure of a man, stretched almost full length along the lower step, up against the brick wall.

Ped was next to him, and he flicked a match to life on the wall.

The man's eyes were open and staring, his face had the marble pallor of death.

The entire front of his shirt was dark with blood.

Ped asked, "You know him, Joe?"

"No. What cooks? Who killed him?"

Ped shrugged, and stood erect. "Let's go to my room."

"Not yet," Joe said. "What's this all about, Ped?"

"In my room," Ped repeated. "Come on—I want to show you something."

Joe followed him back up the steps and along the rear of the house to the side door, which opened right off the corner of the house. Again they went down a flight of steps, but inside the house this time, past a furnace, a laundry room to a walled-off corner in this dry, dusty basement. It was Ped's room.

There was an iron bed, its white enamel chipped and discolored. There were two army blankets on the bed and no pillow. A gas plate stood on a rickety table.

It was a reasonably clean room, considering Ped. It was too hot now; the heat was on and the pipes that led to this corner of the house went through the room's ceiling.

Ped reached under the bed and brought out a package, newspaper wrapped. He opened it on the bed.

CURRENCY, bundles of it, neatly stacked and banded. Tens, twenties, hundreds, mostly hundreds. Joe looked at it for seconds.

"A little over seventy-three thousand dollars," Ped said. "You were talking about money, Joe?"

"Where'd it come from?"

He nodded toward the outside. "That dead man had it. It was lying right next to his head. I found him this morning, Joe, when I was picking up paper in the yard."

"You work here?"

"That's right." Ped's eyes were studying Joe and his manner was wary, as though he hadn't expected this response. "I fill the stoker and take care of the trash, and for that they give me this room. And not a dime besides. And now I've got over seventy-three thousand dollars—"

"You think it's yours, Ped?"

"I think it's mine. Sit down."

There was no place to sit besides the bed. Joe sat on that as Ped raked the money closer to himself in a proprietary gesture.

This wasn't the alcoholic Ped who'd been a landmark at Heeney's. The man sitting on the bed across from Joe was resolute, and his speech was sharp and brisk.

"Twelve years ago," he began, "I was sent up the river, Joe. I was an accountant then, working for the Alamo Press. I handled a lot of the firm's money." He stopped, to light a cigarette with trembling hands. "We weren't audited as often as we should have been. When we were—I was seventy-three thousand and some

Message from Garcia

Texas Artist Tells Why It's
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SAN ANTONIO, Texas—Tony R. Garcia, San Antonio artist and illustrator, knows that it's *taste* that counts in a whiskey. "Tell everybody," he says, "that I switched to Calvert because of its *mild, and smooth taste*."



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dollars short. I hadn't taken a dime of it."

Joe shook his head and said nothing.

"It's all there," Ped said.

"It's not yours," Joe said.

"Isn't it?"

"The law doesn't think so."

"You're not the law, Joe."

"I work with them. When I don't, I lose my license."

"How long are you going to be a private operative after tonight? With ten dollars and a beat-up Chev, what kind of a business are you going to run?"

"There's a dead man outside, Ped."

"There's a dead man in this room, too. Me. I've got a wife, Joe, though she probably doesn't admit it now."

"Why did you tell me about this, Ped?"

"Because out of that whole gang at Heeney's, you're the only one who treats me like a human being."

Joe said nothing.

"The cops will find that—man outside. If they find the money, too, how would it look? I'm short seventy-three thousand, and they find a dead guy outside my room with the same amount on him. You think I couldn't burn, because of that? How would it look to you?"

"Just a little worse than it looks to me now. I've seen coincidences from time to time, but never a seventy-three thousand dollar one, Ped. Where do you think that money came from? Don't you think it's the money that's missing?"

The other man nodded. "I think it is. It's conscience money. But who is he? And who killed him?"

"You don't know him?"

"I never saw him before in my life."

"You've had experience with murder before, Ped?"

"What kind of a remark is that?"

"You're nervous, but not as nervous as I'd expect for a gent who finds a corpse, to say nothing of seventy-three thousand dollars."

"I believe in justice, Joe. That's all that

kept me from going plain stir-crazy."

Ped was stacking the money now, and his fingers moved deftly, his hands showing no sign of their former trembling. He wrapped the package, tied it.

"You still think I should go to the police with this?"

"I'm not your conscience, Ped."

"No, and you're not the man I thought you were, either. I made a mistake in you, Joe." He stood up. "Okay, let's go. One less drunk in the world isn't going to mean much."

Joe didn't rise. He said, "I never knew you to pity yourself like this before, Ped. You can't be burned on circumstantial evidence."

"Don't tell me about the law. I spent eight years in the clink for less than they'd cook up out of this mess."

"What do you want from me, Ped?"

"Keep the money safe. I've got a couple hundred of it, and it's all I'll need now. I'm going to get cleaned up. I'm going to burn these clothes and buy a suit. I want you to go out and see my wife."

"You want me to take a message?"

Ped shook his head. "I want to be sure, first. You're a detective; you're supposed to know how to find out things. Before I see her, I want to know if she wants me." He handed Joe the package.

Joe reached into an inner pocket for a notebook and from it he tore a page. He worded the receipt carefully, but no matter how carefully he worded it, he couldn't eliminate the seventy-three grand. That put his neck out there, alongside Ped's.

He went up the stairs and out.

CHAPTER TWO

Dead Man's Play

IT WAS a lower middle class neighborhood and innocent enough, but Joe was nervous as he stowed the package in the deck of the coupe. He locked the

lid, tried the handle twice, and decided to stay out in front until the law arrived. It didn't take long.

A prowler car came sliding up behind the coupe. The uniformed man who got out from the right side was an officer Joe knew, a man named Burke.

"It would be you," Burke said, "and right in the middle of a cup of coffee, too. What's the story, Joe?"

"Unidentified corpse found by the janitor here," Joe said, "C'mon, I'll show you. Better bring a flashlight." He started down the alley.

Burke and his partner followed Joe along the narrow walk that skirted the house, into the back yard and over to the cellar entrance.

Burke went down the steps with the flashlight as the wail of a siren sounded a few blocks off.

"I hope it's not Norman," Joe said.

Al Norman was the workhorse of Homicide and a man Joe had never gotten along with.

"So do I," Burke said. "We'll be here all night if it is."

Ped came along the rear of the house now, and Joe said, "Here's the man who found him."

Burke came back up the steps. "How'd you get into it, Joe?"

"He didn't have any money, and he came down to Heeney's to look for me, figuring I'd phone the law. He didn't have a nickel."

The other officer said, "I'll go and meet the Homicide men."

Burke watched him until he'd turned the corner, and then looked back at Joe. "That's a hell of a story. That's the kind Norman will raise hob with."

"If you've got a better one, I'll buy it," Joe said. "This one happens to be true."

Burke had a notebook out, the flashlight pressed between his upper arm and his side.

"Name?" he asked Ped.

"Pedway Jorgenson. I'm the janitor here."

"When and how did you find the body?"

"About six-thirty," Ped said, "and I found it dead."

Burke frowned, and said, "I mean, how did you happen to find the body?"

"I went out to pick up the paper in the yard, and I went over to that entrance, there. The trash always seems to blow down there if there's any wind. I saw him as soon as I took the first step down, and I got kind of sick. I could see the blood."

"You didn't get close, then? You don't know if he's a tenant in the building?"

Joe said, "When I came back with him, we looked at the face. He doesn't know him."

Burke looked at Joe and then at Ped. "That right?" He was frowning again.

"That's right," Ped said.

There were lights in the alley, and then the police ambulance was driving into the yard. From the front, a heavy, tall man came along the walk.

It was Al Norman. Burke went to meet him.

Ped said to Joe, "It looks bad, huh? I can tell."

"Relax," Joe said. But his own palms were wet.

Norman talked to Burke a minute and then came over. He nodded at Joe, then turned to Ped.

"What gave you the cute idea of going to a private dick before calling in?" he asked.

"He's a special friend of mine," Joe explained. "He was scared."

Al Norman's glance covered Ped's dirty, worn clothing and his smile was cynical as he looked at Joe. "Friend of yours? Things that tough?"

"That wasn't very funny, Al," Joe said quietly. "That's right, he's a friend of

mine. A drinking buddy. You should know about drinking, Al."

Al Norman's one black mark in department records had resulted from a brawl with a uniformed rookie who'd tried to pick him up for drunkenness. It was an obsession with him, and nothing to mention.

He stared at Joe for seconds. Then, "Both of you had better come down to the station with me."

Ped looked down at the ground. Joe said, "Okay."

Three hours later, Joe was released. He stopped on the way out to ask the desk sergeant, "That Pedway Jorgenson been released yet?"

The desk sergeant shook his head. "Norman says hold him all night at least, Joe."

"The Chief here?"

The sergeant shook his head.

"Norman still here?"

The sergeant nodded back toward the squad room. "Unless he went out the back way."

He hadn't. It was eleven o'clock, and Joe knew Norman had been on duty since morning. He kept his voice polite, "You're holding Jorgenson?"

"That's exactly it."

"On what charge?"

"Vagrancy. You got any squawks, write a letter to the Journal. Don't bother me."

"I can see him?"

Norman sighed, compressed his lips, and sighed again. "Yup. See the sergeant."

The sergeant sent a turnkey with him to Ped's cell. Ped looked weary and beaten.

Joe glanced at the turnkey and asked Ped, "Did I give you a receipt for your retainer?"

Ped's blue eyes didn't waver. "If you did, I lost it. It isn't anywhere around here."

"They took your money?"

"They're holding it."

"You'll be out in the morning," Joe said. "A vagrancy charge looks silly, with the money you had on you. If you're not out by ten o'clock, I'll have a lawyer down here."

Ped's smile was weary. "A ten dollar lawyer, Joe?"

"An eight dollar lawyer," Joe said. "I've got two meals to buy before then."

He went to an all-night restaurant for supper. Three egg sandwiches later, he went home. He took the bundle of currency out of the rear deck, and took it up to his bed-in-the-wall apartment. He put it under the covers at his feet and slept the sleep of the innocent.

In the morning he went to his bank. Three dollars and a quarter went for a safe deposit box, and he had a little over five dollars left.

A portion of that went for a couple shots of rye at Heeney's.

Heeney said, "They got Ped in the clink, I hear."

"Not for long," Joe said. Heeney looked at him and left it at that.

HE LEFT Heeney's with four dollars and eighty-five cents. He spent a dollar for gas for the Chev. Then he headed out Marvin Drive, toward the far north side.

Elinor Jorgenson was shaking out a small rug on the front porch when Joe came up the walk. After he'd introduced himself and established her identity, she seemed paler, and her brown eyes were frightened.

She said, "Is it about my husband? Is it about Ped?"

"Haven't you read the morning papers?"

She shook her head. "What's happened? You're not from the police, are you? You're a private detective?"

"Private," Joe agreed. "I'm working

for the bonding house that had your husband covered, before—before he was sent to jail."

"Oh. There's new evidence? Something has—"

Joe shook his head. "I'd like to talk to you, Mrs. Jorgenson."

"Of course," she said. "Come in. I'm sorry, Mr. Keller. I haven't heard from Ped since he was released. Is he all right?"

The living room was cheerfully furnished, a small room with a picture window overlooking the porch. There were two portraits on the table near Joe. One was a boy of twelve or so, the other was a younger, cleaner, happier Pedway Jorgenson.

"Ped's all right," Joe said. "He never came home, after his release?"

She shook her head, her gaze intent on Joe's face. "He was proud, I guess, and ashamed."

"You're working?"

She nodded. "Nights—at a bakery over near Wells. Why did you come to see me, Mr. Keller?"

"The bonding house isn't satisfied. They're concerned with justice too, you know, even if—"

"You can quit lying, Mr. Keller," she interrupted quietly. "My husband wasn't bonded."

"I'm sorry," Joe said. "I came here to tell you Ped wants to come home. He wanted me to find out if he was welcome."

Joe didn't need an answer. It was in her eyes, in her suddenly trembling hands. "Of course he's welcome. Mr. Keller, this isn't another trick? If you knew how I've missed him—"

"It's no trick," Joe said, "but there are some other things you'd better know."

He told her about the dead man, and about Ped's being held. Then, after some deliberation, he told her about the money, and what they'd done about it.

She was pale when he'd finished, but

she sat erect in her chair and her small chin was thrust forward determinedly. "Wouldn't it be better for everybody concerned if you told the police about the money, too?"

"For everybody but Ped—and you and Johnny."

"But he can't keep it. It isn't right. You tell him he can't keep it, Mr. Keller."


"I'll try," Joe promised. "A couple hundred of it he wants to use for clothes, and getting cleaned up. He's been living in a basement over on 13th."

"Tell him not to spend a nickel of that money. He can get cleaned up here. All his clothes are here, waiting for him."

"I'll tell him," Joe said. "He'll be—awfully pleased."

He left and drove out Marvin the three blocks to the Alamo Press. It was a fairly old building of red brick, and the pounding of its presses could be heard from the curb.

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Joe went up a short flight of steps to the employment office, and showed the girl there his badge.

"The big boss in?"

"Mr. Grootemorn? I'm sure he is. You'll have to go around the other way to see him, though. The entrance on Vine."

Joe went around to the entrance on Vine, to a plushier outer office. The badge worked as well here as at the working end of the plant. He was in Grootemorn's office almost immediately.

"I suppose you've read the morning papers," Joe said.

Grootemorn nodded. He was a short, squat man, and all his actions were deliberate. He had a full mouth and gentle brown eyes.

"I've been checking back on Jorgenson, and I wondered about that money he was short. I never did get the exact figures."

"Seventy-three thousand, two hundred and ten dollars," Grootemorn said. "It was quite a blow to me at the time, though I've recovered since." His smile was tight. "You're from headquarters, Mr. Keller?"

Joe shook his head. "I'm working for a client who's concerned with justice. He's a wealthy man who has become interested in Ped's case."

"You've checked the newspaper files? It was a rather well publicized case at the time. I'm sure you'll find everything you need there."

Joe rose. "I take it you don't like Jorgenson much?"

Grootemorn was looking at his desk top. "I was like a brother to him. I had so much affection for him, and then to have him—" He shook his head and looked up. "I'd rather not talk any more about it, Mr. Keller. Good day." Grootemorn turned back to his desk. Joe left the office.

Everybody loved Ped; his wife and

Joe and Heeney and even Grootemorn. But Ped had gone to jail, gotten out, and was back in. There was a joker in the deck somewhere

Joe went down to the station, and learned that Pedway had been released. He went down to a local newspaper and had the story dug out of the morgue.

There were pictures of Pedway and his wife. There was a picture of the year-old Johnny. He followed the twelve year old story from the front pages of the first part of the case until it had dwindled to a small item on page twenty.

There had been cash paid to non-existent creditors, goods bought from non-existent suppliers, and other intricacies of the erring accountant. There was the two thousand and some dollars Ped had deposited in his account, which he claimed to have won at poker. The men he claimed to have played with did not support his story.

Joe put the names down. There were four men, and two of them he knew as local gamblers.

Something flickered in the back of his brain, but it wouldn't come forward where he could examine it. It bothered him all the way to Rocky's Regal Rendezvous.

Rocky's was a meeting place for all the horse, poker, bridge and sucker players in town. At least one of the poker players should be there.

One was. A bald, fat man with a wrinkle-free face and grey eyes, wearing a very shiny brown gabardine suit. He was sitting at the far end of Rocky's mammoth bar, drinking a small beer. He was Carl Vetter.

Joe identified himself and said, "I'm checking back on the Jorgenson case. Remember it?"

"Jorgenson? Oh, you mean Ped."

"That's right. Haven't you read the papers today?"

"Just reading the Racing Form. Something about Ped in the papers?"

"He found a dead man," Joe said, watching for a reaction.

There was none on the smooth, round face. "That could happen to anybody. What's Ped doing now?"

"He's a part-time janitor. He's busted. It doesn't sound like a man who's supposed to have chiseled seventy-three grand does it?"

Vetter shrugged. "Six years, according to the papers, Ped was milking this Grootemorn. In six years, you can lose a lot of money at poker."

"You think that's where the seventy-three thousand went?"

"Where else?"

"I don't know—yet. You played poker with Ped quite often?"

The smooth face was too composed. "You could look up the testimony on that." Vetter said.

"I just thought I'd ask." Joe said. "And if you'd have made a bet with that face you just showed me, I'd have called it."

"Talk is cheap," Vetter said. "Shoot or drop the cue."

Joe said, "I've only got three dollars and eighty-five cents. You can't buy a new suit for that."

The face wasn't so bland now. There was color in it, and the grey eyes were mean. "You're a smart guy, shamus. You could get a bloody nose, talking like that."

"Not from a punk like you," Joe said. "When I think of a good guy like Ped being sent up because jerks like you can be bought in wholesale lots, it brings out the worst in me. Just be thankful I only insulted you instead of slugging you."

HE ROSE and left. He got to the street, walked two paces to the south, stood there a few seconds, and came back to the doorway.

Through the glass front of the doorway, he could see that Carl Vetter had left his

stool at the end of the bar and was heading rapidly for a phone booth.

From there, Joe went back to 13th, and the basement abode of Pedway Jorgenson.

Ped sat on the chipped, enameled bed smoking a hand-made cigarette and looking glum.

He brightened when Joe told him, "Elinor is waiting. She's been waiting all the time, Ped. You were pretty rough on her."

"You've seen her? Joe, you're not—no, you wouldn't." He crushed the cigarette on the floor. "Let's go and get some clothes," he said.

Joe shook his head. "Give me the money, Ped. There's soap there, and all your old suits. You won't need it."

"But Joe—"

"Give me the money, Ped."

Ped handed it over, ten twenty dollar bills and one ten.

Joe took the change from his pocket, the eighty-five cents, and said, "You can get there as quick by bus as I can take you. I'll stay here."

"Here? Why, Joe?"

"A hunch. Get going, Ped. Your wife's waiting." Jorgenson nodded and went.

Joe sat on the bed and read the only reading material in the room, a week-old paper. He'd finished that in the first half hour. He sat there for another hour and a half, and it was one o'clock, and nothing had happened.

He left and went to the bank. He was going to put the remainder Ped had given him with the rest of the money, when the thought that had been in the back of his head came to the front.

He stopped at one of the tellers he knew, and slid the money in under the grill. "Does that look all right to you?"

The teller looked at him queerly.

"There's a chance it might be counterfeit, and I wondered about it," Joe explained.

The teller picked up the bills, examined them, and said, "Mr. Allencort is the man who could tell. I'll show them to him."

He left the cage, and Joe waited. When he came back, he was smiling.

"Mr. Allencort says if they're counterfeit, they're the first ones that ever fooled him."

"Allencort's the authority on funny money, huh?"

"At this bank. He's not infallible, of course. The Federal men could tell."

"I won't crowd my luck," Joe said.

He put two hundred and ten in the box with the rest of it, which brought his working capital down to three dollars again. Lunch would cost him a third of that. Then he remembered there was still some food at home, and he got his car and went there.

He saw the car in front, and thought nothing of it. The men sitting in the front seat seemed to be watching him as he came along the walk, and he looked in their direction. They didn't look away.

He went in and up to his apartment. He was just fishing two eggs out of the carton in his refrigerator when the bell rang. He had a gun in the desk, in his living-sleeping room, and he considered picking it up on the way to the door. He decided against it.

Both of the men who stood in front of his door were tall. One was thin, and had a face like a fox. The other was heavy.

They both walked in, past Joe, without any invitation. Heavy closed the door behind him.

"What cooks?" Joe asked.

Fox-face permitted himself a small smile. "Just slumming. We talked to Jorgenson, and he says you've got something for us."

Joe's hands were moist again. "You talked to Ped? When?"

"Right after he left his rat trap. We picked him up in front."

"Nothing's happened to him? You didn't—"

Fox-face shook his head. "Nothing's happened to him—yet. You got the money handy?"

Joe shook his head.

"You wouldn't think of going to the police with it, would you?"

"You'd like that, wouldn't you?" Joe said.

A flicker of something moved across the sharp one's face, and Joe was sure he'd scored.

Heavy said to Fox-face, "He's smart, Ray. He's no dummy. Let me work some of the brain out of him."

"Shut up," Ray said. His eyes still hadn't left Joe. "No, we don't want you to take it to the police. Just give it back to Ped. It's his money."

"He doesn't want it," Joe lied. "Maybe the Feds would."

There was a silence, and Heavy said, "I told you, Ray. This slob's got ideas."

"He's not that smart," Ray said. "Give him one for a start, Alfred."

Joe turned to meet Heavy, but he had underestimated the big man's speed. A hand like a mallet caught him flush in the mouth as he turned.

There was blood in his mouth, and the bile of his anger, and he started a right for the center of that bovine face.

Ray's stiff palm caught him across the windpipe, from the side and Joe sagged, nausea welling in him.

Then the mallet came home to his jaw, and he went down.

When he came to, Alfred was standing over him. Ray was on the davenport, a gun in his hand. The place had been ransacked. Ray's left hand held the key to the safety deposit box.

He threw it to Joe. "Get the money. Take it to Jorgenson. Keep your mouth shut. Next time, things will be rougher."

Ray sighted the gun at Joe's head, and the smile on his face was bleak. Then he

put the gun away and rose. "You've got twenty-four hours. You could live a long time."

Joe saw Alfred's open hand come sweeping down, but he couldn't duck in time. It caught him flush on the ear, and his head rang. He didn't hear them leave.

It was another minute before he got to his feet. He felt his jaw and it was tender. He felt his lip, and it was puffed like a baseball. He examined his wallet; the three dollars were still there.

CHAPTER THREE

Frame for a Corpse

HE WALKED very carefully to the telephone so as not to disturb his heaving stomach. He called the Jorgenson home, and Ped answered.

"Those men get to you, Ped?"

"Sure. I'm all right. How about you, Joe?"

"They got to me. But you're all right, Ped?"

"I'm scared. You think we'd better get the cops on it? I'm not scared for me, but there's Elinor and Johnny."

"Maybe you'd better, for your own protection. Tell them about the men. Don't tell them about me, yet. You got a clean suit on, Ped? You feeling all right?"

"I'm clean," Ped said. "But I'm scared, Joe."

"I'm a little scared, myself," Joe said. He hung up.

He wasn't quite as scared as he was angry, and he was almost as hungry as he was angry. He scrambled some eggs and ate them slowly.

His face was sore, and he went into the bathroom to bathe it with a warm, wet towel. He felt almost human after that.

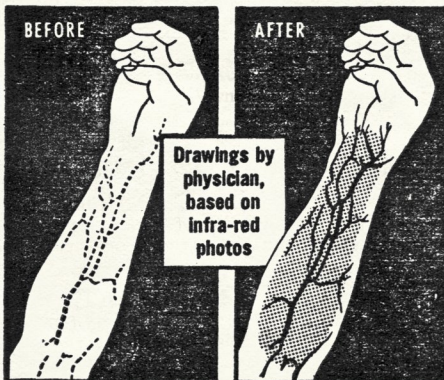
He went back to 13th Street, but not to the basement of the rooming house. He parked across the street, about a quarter block away, and sat. He had bought a paper on the way over, and read about the man who'd been found in the back yard.

His name was Eli Jeffrey, and he was nothing, literally. A small time grifter, gambler and vagrant. A man who could be bought or sold for peanuts, and frequently was. Eli Jeffrey was a small man in a big game.

Heavy Alfred and Fox-face Ray were a little higher in the scale, but not much.

There was a coincidence in this game, but not the seventy-three thousand, two hundred and ten dollars. It was a geographical coincidence, and time had robbed it even of that.

Joe left his car and went over to the fairly new apartment house next to the rooming house. Most of the names were Mr. and Mrs. There was one that wasn't, and it was a name Joe recognized from his time spent at the newspaper morgue.



HOW SLOAN'S LINIMENT AIDS MUSCULAR PAINS

Here's vital news for sufferers from muscular aches and rheumatic pains. Using infra-red rays, scientists have now succeeded in photographing blood-vessels *below the skin-surface*. These photos (see pictures at left) prove that, after an application of Sloan's Liniment, the veins *expand* . . . evidence that the treated area gets *extra* supplies of blood, to revitalize tissues and wash away waste matter and poisons faster.

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He went back to the car, and picked up the paper again. The shot that killed Eli Jeffrey had been fired from a height, and the new apartment house had been Joe's first guess.

The ballistics boys had deduced that Eli had been shot standing up and had not died immediately, but had headed for the first sanctuary he saw, the basement steps.

Joe sat in the Chev, occasionally rubbing his sore jaw and hating Alfred. He was sitting there when the department car pulled up across the street, and Al Norman slid out from behind the wheel.

Al came right over to the Chev. He looked at Joe's battered face, and asked, "What happened to you?"

"I forgot to duck. Looking for me, Al?"

"A little. Jorgenson phoned, and told me about your wanting to wait here."

"I've been to the bank and home, since I left here," Joe told him. "You know a racketeer with a face like a cow, Al?"

"A lot of them. He in this business?"

"I guess. Just another stooge."

Al frowned, and coughed. "I was a little rough last night, Joe," he said apologetically.

"I'll admit it. And you shouldn't have. Pedway Jorgenson's an all right guy who was framed. I'm proud to be his friend."

"We'll forget it, Joe," Al said. "Framed you say?"

"Like a picture. Not once, but twice."

Al nodded thoughtfully. "Maybe. I've been thinking, Joe. I kind of—"

"I knew you'd get around to it," Joe said. "You've been reading some old newspapers."

"Sure. How'd you know?"

"Because you're the kind of careful, hard working gent who would, Al. But you wouldn't have, if I'd have left things the way they were. Everything would have been staged, and the money would have been returned."

"The money," he said. "How did you

know that I knew about the money?"

"Somebody would have told you by now. Either Jorgenson or the killer. That was the original plan, that the money be found by the police, and the story set up. The killer didn't figure Eli would disappear. He didn't figure those steps."

"How do you figure the money?"

"The same way you do."

"Where is it now?"

"In a bank, a safety deposit box. Here's the key, Al."

Al Norman took the key, and stared at it without speaking.

"That woman," he said, "who figured in the alienation of affections suit. She lives in the apartment house?"

"That's right. I see you've been reading a lot, Al. That item was the last one I ran across."

"But they were never divorced. If he sailed for this other dame—"

"It was his wife's money, originally, and his wife's relatives are all stockholders. You see—" Then Joe stopped and pointed. "There he is. Turn your face away."

The man who got out of the Caddy in front of the apartment house had not looked their way, though. He walked directly to the door and went inside.

Al said, "I'll go up and shake it out of him, if it's in him."

"No," Joe said. "He'll tighten up around the law. There's a chance he'll figure he can buy me. Those stooges of his might have told him I had only three bucks in my pockets."

"It's not—" Al started to say.

"If it works, it's legal," Joe said. "I want this guy, Al. Even if he only tells me where that Alfred lives, I want this guy."

Al's smile was dim. "This Alfred is responsible for the lumps?"

"Right."

Al nodded. "Go get him, Joe. I'll be listening at the door."

Joe went ahead. In the lobby he pressed the button next to the name of Anna-belle Stervisc, and the door buzzed after a few seconds. He walked up to the second floor and down the hall to a doorway that was open.

The woman standing in the doorway was attractive in a heavy, dark way, but no youngster by any standards. Her dark eyes surveyed Joe wonderingly.

"You rang my bell?"

Joe nodded. "I want to talk to Grootemorn. He's here, isn't he?"

She shook her head. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"I saw him come in here," Joe said.

"I said he wasn't here." The woman's heavy face was sullen. "Do I have to call the police to get rid of you?"

"I'm afraid you will. You go call them. I'll wait here."

Her eyes were snapping, now. Then, from behind her, a voice said, "Let him in, Ann. It's the private detective."

Joe went into a small, narrow hall and through that to an ornately, expensively furnished living room.

Grootemorn was standing near the window, and he turned to face Joe.

Joe said, "I'm here in the interests of the man you considered a brother. I'm here to clear Ped."

GROOTEMORN'S round face showed no emotion. He licked his full lips, and his brown eyes were blank. "You've been a considerable annoyance to me, Mr. Keller."

"I've tried to be," Joe said. "Who's that Alfred guy you've got working for you?"

Grootemorn ignored the question. He indicated a davenport. "Sit down, Mr. Keller, and state your business."

Joe sat down, and said, "Ped's my business. You'll have trouble with the police, probably, but that's your headache."

Grootemorn sat in a dark, mohair-up-

holstered chair. He studied Joe thoughtfully. "Why should I have trouble with the police?"

"Murder," Joe said, "and grand larceny, I suppose it would be. Forgery and more trouble than a man can handle, Grootemorn. But as I said, that doesn't concern me. I'm here for Ped."

Grootemorn said nothing.

Joe said, "Did you teach him to play poker? A man who loves money as much as you do must play poker. You married money. You probably didn't marry as much as you'd hoped for, but it got you the Alamo Press, didn't it? You were an engraver before that, one of the best in the business."

"Let's talk about Ped," Grootemorn said.

"Okay, but I'll have to mention you, from time to time. You keep getting into the picture. The fact you didn't have Ped bonded was the first break in the case. Why not? Maybe you didn't want any bonding-house dicks in the case. You changed his books; you've the skill for that. You covered up the money you'd stolen by framing Ped for it, and Ped was sent up."

The dark woman said, "Fritz, you don't have to sit there and listen to such—"

Grootemorn raised a hand and she was silent.

"Ped was sent up, and forgotten," Joe went on, "but you still needed money, because you were spending more than the Alamo Press could bring in. This counterfeiting was the next idea. I'll admit you're an artist there. Most of the funny money boys settle for one denomination. You could make any of them, and good enough to fool bank clerks. But the tough part about the racket is the distribution. Gambling's one way; gambling with cheap money must be a gambler's dream. You used it, and some of the other card sharps used it, and still you weren't happy. May-

be you couldn't win, even with cheap money, huh? Or maybe you couldn't put it in the bank if you did win. There's always the income tax people."

"What has all this nonsense got to do with Jorgenson?" Grootemorn asked.

"I'm getting to that," Joe said quietly. "One day, while you're here, with your—your friend, you see Pedway in the backyard next door. Probably picking up papers. It's like fate, isn't it, having a stooge so handy, a lamb you've roasted before? Here's a way to get seventy-three thousand, two hundred and ten dollars of funny money in one lump, money you can put in the bank and no questions asked. I like the way you aged that money; that's another mistake of most counterfeiters, their bills are too crisp and new. You set the stage, get Eli to take the package over, kill Eli from the window here. Then you have your friends swear up and down that you were somewhere else."

Grootemorn inhaled deeply and blew it out through his full lips. He ran a hand over his forehead.

"Remarkable," he said.

"I'm kind of proud of myself," Joe admitted.

The dark woman said, "Fritz, you're admitting—"

Again, he raised his hand. Again she fell silent.

"Remarkable," Grootemorn repeated, "and for what? You won't get rich on clients like Pedway Jorgenson."

"I guess not," Joe agreed. "What's your proposition?"

"You'll bring the money back. It will not be found. Your friend Ped will be clear. You can work for me."

"And the police?" Joe asked.

"What about them?"

"They're getting closer. They'll need a patsy of one kind or another. I was thinking of Alfred."

Grootemorn chuckled. "He is a stupid man, but indispensable in my business."

"You won't even tell me his name?"

"Not yet."

"I'm wasting my time," Joe said. "All I really wanted was Alfred's name and address." He stood up.

"Just a moment," Grootemorn said.

But Joe was at the door, now, and it was open, and Al Norman stood there. The gun in Al's hand was steady, pointing right at Grootemorn.

HEENEY said, "What'll it be gents?"

"Rye for me," Joe said, and Al Norman said, "Beer."

It was the next day, and Al looked tired. "They all talked," he said, "that woman, and Carl Vetter, and Grootemorn's starting to. Can't find those two lugs, though, Joe. That big one's a gun out of St. Louis."

"I'll get to him, some day," Joe said. "Business is picking up. Had two calls already this morning, before ten o'clock."

"How about after ten?"

"Owed the phone people, and they took the phone out," Joe said. "I'll take care of that as soon as I get a retainer."

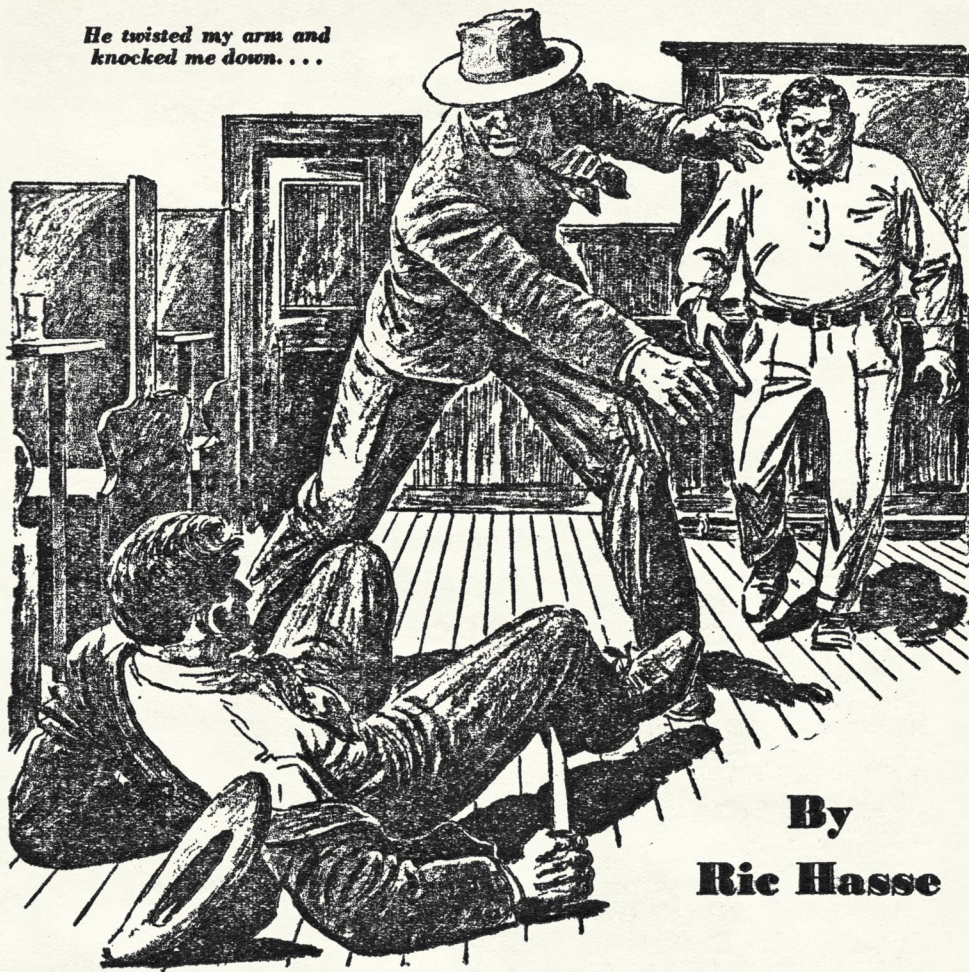
"Why don't you come back, Joe?" Al said. "The Chief wants you, and I want you. It's not big money, but it's steady."

Joe shook his head. "I've got a start now. I want to make enough to take a month off, to take a trip. After I come back from St. Louis, ask me again."

A YARMOUTH, England, judge recently released four young thieves for lack of evidence, though their guilt was certain. The culprits had eaten the evidence—sixty-four quarts of stolen ice cream.

—Henry Lea

*He twisted my arm and
knocked me down. . . .*



**By
Ric Hasse**

*The dead man wanted to trade raps with
Sanford, for how else could he prove
that—*

TWO MUST DIE!

APPARENTLY Sergeant Jaeger was handling this case. Jaeger is Lieutenant Beauchamp's right hand, especially on burglary cases. You see, I know all about the cops in this town. I make it my business to know.

Beauchamp has charge of all the burglary and armed robbery cases, but he's

usually too lazy to get out of that nice padded leather chair he has down at headquarters. He gets the homicide cases, too, but there aren't many killings in this town. A nice, clean town, this. I like it. A nice clean town with dumb cops.

Each case is just like every other one to these cops, and they handle them all

with exactly the same worthless routine.

Take these four I was riding with. Sergeant Jaeger was a big man, fat and untidy, and right now he was giving me the silent treatment. He came up to my room with his crew and got me out of bed. He told me they wanted me down at headquarters, and said nothing more. I'd washed, brushed my teeth, and put on my dark brown suit that I wear to work. I didn't want to get my new sharkskin mussed up, in case Jaeger got rough on the way downtown.

They took me down to a squad car, and still none of them made a sound. I didn't say anything either, but inside I was laughing. These guys! Thinking they could get anywhere with these corny tactics.

I glanced at Jaeger's sagging, weather-beaten face. He was looking disinterestedly out of the squad car window, and his only motion was when his fat lips shifted the position of the sodden cigar stub he held between his teeth.

I turned my head to the detective on the other side of me on the back seat. His name was Niblack, and he was slouched down, with his head thrown back and his eyes closed. He looked asleep, but I knew he wasn't.

The driver was just a driver, in a police uniform, but the young man beside me was a new one on me. He was wearing a neat blue suit, and from the alert way he carried his head and the way he stared around him, his eyes bright with interest, I figured him for one of the new rookies recently added to the force.

Bright, ambitious youngsters, these rookies. The police Department gives them six weeks of schooling, as if these cops could teach anyone then circulates them around through the different squads.

I decided to have a little fun, so I asked, "Why don't you guys find someone else to play games with? I wasn't near the Elite Loan Company last night."

I knew what Sergeant Jaeger would say before he opened his mouth. "How'd you know we wanted you for the Elite Loan job?" he would ask.

Jaeger turned his head toward me and looked as though he were surprised that I was still there. He took the cigar stub out of his mouth and said, "What makes you think we want you for the Elite Loan job?" I was fairly close, anyway.

The rookie saved the day. He twisted his alert head around and snapped, quickly, "How did you know the Elite Loan safe was cracked?" Ah, he had me trapped!

I chuckled. "I saw it in the morning paper."

"How, Sanford?" the rookie demanded.

"My landlady always puts the paper on the chair inside my door." I chuckled again. "I saw it on my way to the bathroom."

The rookie opened his mouth to say something else, but Sergeant Jaeger said, "There was a morning paper in his room, Holt. You should learn to keep your eyes open." The rookie's shoulders drooped.

The squad car pulled into the curb, and Jaeger leaned forward. I looked out. We were in front of a third-rate hotel.

"Look, Jaeger," I demanded. "What is this? What are you trying to pull here? You've no right to take me anywhere but police headquarters."

"Tell it to your lawyer," Jaeger said.

He pushed me out, and the detective, Niblack, took my elbow and guided me into the hotel lobby, with Jaeger and the rookie following behind.

The clerk at the desk looked like he was ready to duck as we paraded across the murky little lobby, past the red cigarette machine and up the dimly lighted stairway. We went up two flights and three doors down a dirty, disinfectant-smelling hallway. A wizened little character carrying a black leather case was coming out of the room.

Lieutenant Beauchamp was standing with his back to the room, his hands clasped behind him.

Jaeger said, "Here he is, Lieutenant," and walked over to a chair and sat down. The rookie closed the door and stood stiffly in front of it. Detective Niblack walked into the bathroom, and I could hear him running himself a drink of water from the faucet. Beauchamp just stood there.

"You can't get away with this kind of stuff, Beauchamp," I said finally. "If anyone in town so much as opens a can of beans that don't belong to him, you guys blame it on me."

LIEUTENANT Beauchamp turned around slowly. He was thin and hard, a granite slab of a man with deep-set eyes that told you nothing. "That's what you get, Sanford, for being the best cracksmen in this part of the country," he said.

"Who, me?" I tried to sound confident, but I was beginning to get nervous. "Why I can't open a jammed window by myself."

Beauchamp made no comment. He walked over to the bed, and I noticed for the first time the long, sheet-covered lump lying on it. Beauchamp said, "Come over here, Sandford."

I wiped a shaking hand across my mouth and went over. I stood on the other side of the bed, and I couldn't take my

eyes off that sheet. Beauchamp grabbed a corner of the white cloth and threw it back.

The man was big and young, with coal-black hair. His head was thrown back unnaturally, his mouth hung open, and his bulging eyes stared unseeingly at the ceiling. His shirtfront was a bloody mess.

Beauchamp flipped the sheet back over the body, and said, "Know him, Sanford?"

I shook my head, and Beauchamp nodded a signal to Niblack. The detective went to the door, opened it, and motioned to someone in the hall outside.

A fat little guy in a white shirt, with a black tie, came in. He looked scared.

Beauchamp said, "This the man?" and the little guy in the bow tie looked at me and said, "Yes, sir. That's him."

I recognized him. He was the bartender in a joint a couple of blocks down the street. I had been in the place last night.

"Well, Sanford?" Beauchamp said. "What were you fighting with Hammond about?"

"Who is Hammond?" I asked. I was trying desperately to figure this thing out.

"The guy on the bed, that you don't know," Beauchamp said sarcastically. "This bartender says you were in his joint with Hammond last night."

"Yeah," I said. "Yeah, that's right. I met the guy in there, but I didn't know


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what his name was. I just called him Nick."

Beauchamp turned to the bartender and asked, "Did he meet Hammond in your bar?"

The fat little man put a hand up to his bow tie and tugged at it nervously. "I wouldn't want to swear to it, sir," he said. "But I think they came in together. At least, the first time I noticed them, they were together."

Beauchamp turned his deep, piercing eyes back to me. "What was the fight about?"

"I don't know what you mean," I struggled. "I didn't fight with the guy."

"Tell it again," Beauchamp told the bartender.

"These two guys were back in the corner booth," the bartender said. "It was maybe a half hour before closing. I heard them scuffling back there, and looked back. They went out of the booth and this guy here was swinging at the Hammond guy. Hammond swung back, and this guy went down on the floor. I grabbed my club from back of the bar and went back there and told them it was closing time and they'd have to leave. They didn't argue with me. They just went on out together. That's all I know, sir."

Beauchamp looked at me with the question written plainly on his face.

I remembered last night all right. I'd been in the back booth and this young fellow sat down across from me and started talking. We were drinking the same brand of beer; I think that's how he picked me to jaw to.

I had a half hour to kill before I went out on this job, so I didn't mind a little company. I discussed the qualities of the different brands of beer with this big black-haired joker, then we switched to baseball, and from that to boxing.

Then this guy, who said his name was Nick, laughed and said, "Boxing! Brother, a man who uses his fists don't stand

a chance against anyone who really knows how to fight. Here, look at this."

He pulled a scabbarded knife from under his coat and handed it across the table to me. It was a pretty fancy weapon, fairly short, with a shiny black handle.

"I took this away from a Storm Troop officer," Nick boasted. "I broke his arm when he tried to knife me. Here, let me show you how I did it."

He insisted that I get out of the booth so he could demonstrate, so I did. I made a half-hearted pass at him with the knife, its blade still in the scabbard, and—bam! Nick hit my wrist with the back of one hand, caught my elbow with the other, hooked a heel behind my ankles, and I was sprawling on the floor.

By the time I'd regained my feet, this little fat bartender had puffed his way back, and told us we'd have to get out.

I told it to Beauchamp like that; just the way it happened. One side of Beauchamp's thin lips lifted into a half smile. From Beauchamp, that's the same as having someone else laugh in your face. He walked over to the dresser and fumbled through some papers and cards, then walked back and held a little bit of worn pasteboard up in front of my eyes.

There was a date on it, 3/5/42, and there was a name, *Nicholas Hammond*, and the notation, 4-F.

"If you'd just met Hammond," he returned to me, in a tired, matter-of-fact voice, "Why did you come up here with him last night?"

"I didn't come up here," I protested. "I couldn't get rid of the guy, so I walked to the hotel with him. I told him good-night in the lobby, and that's as far as I came."

Beauchamp nodded to Nilback again, and this time the detective brought back a bald-headed man with sleepy eyes.

"Tell it again," Beauchamp told him, and the bald-headed man said, "I've already told it to you twice."

"Just one more time," Lieutenant Beauchamp said patiently."

"O KAY," the bald-headed man said. "I'm on the desk downstairs last night. Hammond comes in with this guy here," he nodded in my direction. "They walk across to the stairway, and Hammond starts up first. Then this guy here says, 'What the hell you got to be sore about?'"

Beauchamp prompted, "Then what?"

"Then the switchboard buzzes, and I turn around to answer it. Behind me I hear a noise that sounds to me like somebody gettin' smacked on the kisser. When I look around again, they've both gone on upstairs."

"I didn't go upstairs," I said in a voice that sounded too loud, even to me. "I walked across to the stairway with him, because the cigarette machine is there, and I needed some butts."

Beauchamp just looked at me.

"I said good night to Nick, and he said, 'Nuts to you,' so I said that about getting sore—just kidding him. The noise the desk clerk heard was me pulling the lever on the cigarette machine. Here, look."

I don't know what I expected it to prove, but I dug into my coat pocket and came out with a pack of the mentholated cigarettes I always smoke. Then, too late, I remembered that this wasn't the pack I'd gotten from the machine. I'd taken

these from the glove compartment of my car.

The sleepy night clerk looked at the cigarettes in my hand, then raised his eyes to my face. "Mister," he said, "that cigarette machine in the lobby don't carry that brand, and never did."

"Thanks," Beauchamp said softly. "You can go on to bed now."

The night clerk went out, and Beauchamp turned to study my face. "That the same suit you were wearing last night," he asked, and I nodded dumbly. He was staring at my cuffs, and I looked down at them. There were three brown buttons on the left sleeve, but only two on the right.

Lieutenant Beauchamp shook something from a little manila envelope into the palm of his hand. It was a button.

"Where did you get that," I choked, desperately.

Beauchamp didn't answer me, but from behind me, Sergeant Jaeger's voice said, "It was clenched in Hammond's fist."

"He—he must have pulled it off when he was playing around in the bar."

"Yeah," Jaeger said in a monotone. "And then carried it around in his fist for two hours. He was probably a button collector."

Beauchamp picked up a knife from the dresser, dangling it from a tag tied around the haft. It was a fancy knife, with a round disk at the hilt and a swastika



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carved on it. Its blade was stained now, and the black, shiny handle was dusty with a fine white powder that made the fingerprints on it stand out clear, even across the room.

"This the knife you were talking about?" Beauchamp asked. "The one you saw outside of this room, but no one else did?"

I didn't say anything. I wanted to scream, but my voice was glued in my throat, strangling me.

"The fingerprints aren't Hammond's," Beauchamp said. "We haven't checked it with yours yet. You want to make any bets?"

I couldn't say anything, so Beauchamp kept talking.

"You fought with him in the bar at eleven-thirty," he said. "And you fought with him on the stairway at midnight. Now, all we want to know, Sanford, is what you did up here between twelve and two-thirty. The coroner says he was alive at twelve-thirty, and probably knocked off somewhere between then and two-thirty. Why don't you be a good boy and tell us all about it."

"At one o'clock I was thirty blocks from here," I blurted desperately. "I was just cutting through the floor to the Elite Loan office. It took me until three-thirty to bypass the alarm system and crack the box there."

Beauchamp smiled his laugh-in-the-face smile again. "You, Sanford? You couldn't open a jammed window without help. Remember? No, Sanford, after all those safe jobs you've been getting away with, we're glad to pin you, all right. But it's not going to be any little five or ten year trip for you. You're going all the way; all the way to the end of the line!"

"I tell you, I pulled the Elite Loan job," I screamed it at him.

Behind me, Sergeant Jaeger said, "We've got the guy who pulled that job, Sanford. A pete man from Chicago. We

picked him up a couple of blocks from the Elite Loan. His tools on him and everything. He hasn't admitted it yet, but the boys have him down in the basement at headquarters. He'll confess to it all right."

"I'm the one that pulled that job," I insisted. The blood was pounding in my ears, and I had to make them believe me. "I mailed the stuff I got from the safe. I mailed the gloves I wore, and all my tools. I always have packages all addressed and stamped and ready to mail, before I go on a job. That's why you never get anything on me. I dropped the packages in the mail collection box at Illinois and Thirty-fourth Streets, just four blocks from the Elite Loan."

"They're addressed to J. Fordham at General Delivery, Chicago. I was going to drive to Chicago, pick up the money and mail my tools back to General Delivery here. The packages will prove that I'm the one that pulled that job! I couldn't have killed Hammond!"

I stopped babbling, and stared at them. They were all grouped in front of me now, and they were all grinning. Sergeant Jaeger, Niblack, the rookie, even Lieutenant Beauchamp—all of them grinning at me.

"That'll prove it, all right, Sanford," Beauchamp said.

From behind me, a familiar voice said, "Hey, Lieutenant. I gotta sneeze. Is it all right if I come up for air now?"

I turned around slowly. The body had moved. It was sitting up in the middle of the bed, and there was a big grin under the black hair.

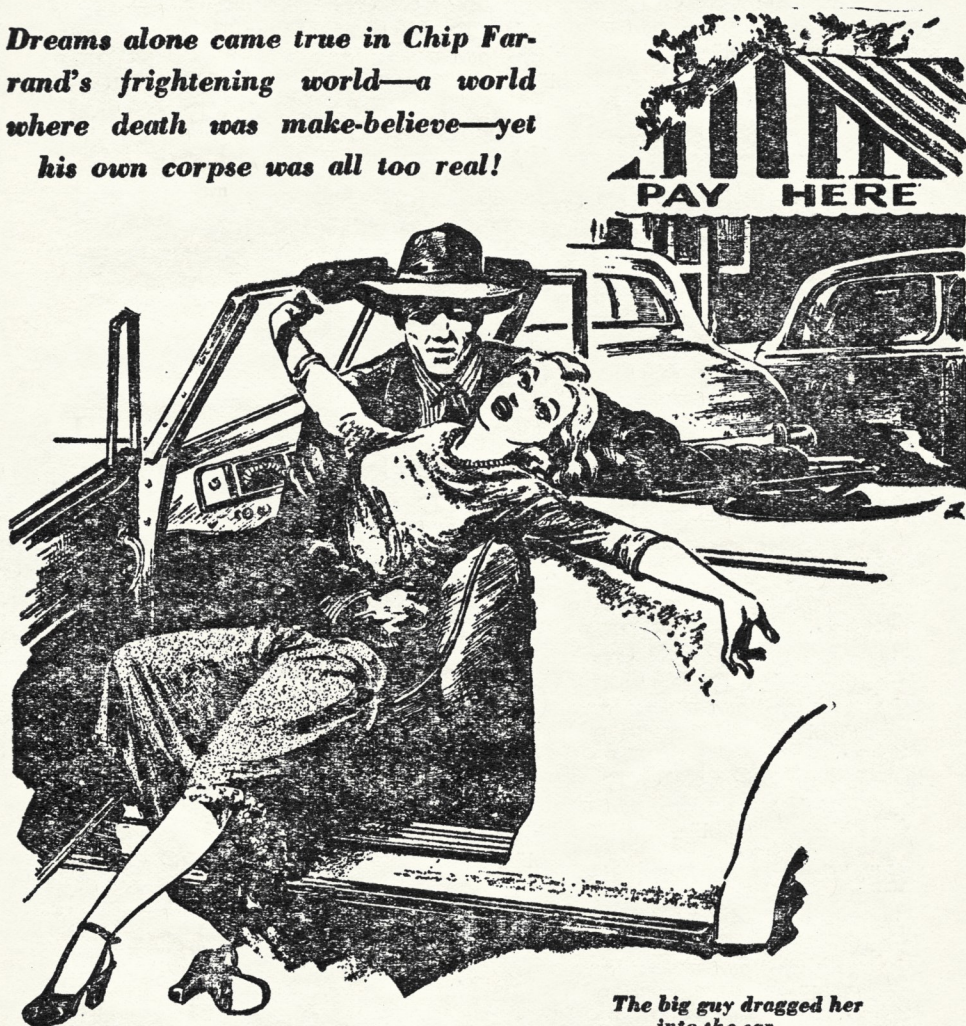
"Hi, Sanford," he said. "You and I will have to have another beer together sometime. Say, about ten years from now. I should be at least a detective sergeant by then, shouldn't I, Lieutenant?"

Lieutenant Beauchamp looked at him and said, "Maybe, rookie, maybe. If you use your head."

LIGHTS! ACTION! MURDER!

By William R. Cox

Dreams alone came true in Chip Farrand's frightening world—a world where death was make-believe—yet his own corpse was all too real!



The big guy dragged her into the car....

CHIP FARRAND said, "I can't live under it, Dolan. I've heard these Hollywood stories. About Mop Morris and who killed her. About Tom Minnich—and that director—Raymond. Open secrets. Everything hushed up.

Crimes covered by money and influence and the odor lingering on. It's fantastic. Everybody giving me that one-eyed look and saying, 'Why, you hardly knew the girl, Farrand. It's ridiculous, Farrand.' And all the time they're thinking I killed

her. But I did not kill Jean Laverne."

Joe Dolan sat behind the battered desk in his dingy office and stared admiringly at his visitor. "You don't talk like a cowboy," he complained gently. "In *Cactus Jack* you had a real Western drawl. My kids started me seein' your pitchers. Now I never miss one. I sure liked that *Wagons Westward*. You from Texas, Mr. Farrand?"

"I am from Massachusetts."

"Where'd you learn to ride so good?"

"I didn't. They have doubles. I mean—I learned to ride in Hollywood."

"That was a swell horse you rode in *Guns For Sale*."

Chip Farrand exhaled gently. "Look, Mr. Dolan—may I call you Joe? Look, Joe. I don't like horses. I don't like cows. I was an engineer, Joe. I was sent out here and somehow I got mixed up with Helene Holland and then suddenly I was a cowboy in pictures."

"I seen you with Helene in that big color epic, *The Idaho Story*. Boy, you're sure lucky, playin' with her. She's beautiful!"

"Beautiful? You mean Helene? Lucky! Me, lucky?" He sighed. He took two one hundred dollar bills from his wallet and placed them on the desk. "Is this enough to hire you? Are you now working for me?"

Dolan looked at the money, then at the ceiling. "I dunno what you want. Super World Pitchers is—well, I did hear certain rumors."

"All I want is certain information. I hear you were once a cop and have friends on the Force. They won't listen to me—but maybe you can get what I want. And I'll want corroborative testimony when I solve this crime. I'm going to learn who killed Jean Laverne. I'll pay you a thousand dollars when it's finished."

"A thousand? Plus this two hundred? Gee, Mr. Farrand—"

"Call me Chip. We're pals. Pick up

the money. Here are two pictures of Jean—one a good snapshot. Dig into her past. Find out something about her. Can you do that?"

"I got a pal or two on the Force, all right—"

"I'm desperate. I can't live with this cloud over me. I can't sleep. I'm losing my mind. They all think I threw a knife at the girl on the reclining board thinking she was Helene Holland."

"You don't like horses?" Dolan shook his head. "I can never tell that to my kids. They're crazy about horses. And cowboys. I'll never let 'em know, Chip." He shifted position, elevating his large feet. He was a middle-aged man, quite stout, with a sympathetic round face. "Okay. Maybe you better tell me your side of this thing."

Helene Holland had almost been finished when she latched onto Chip Farrand, but of course he did not learn that until later. In the beginning he was dazzled by the notoriety, the craning of necks wherever they went, the glittering, shifting scene of Beverly Hills, Bel Air, Brentwood and Palm Springs, the neon brilliance of the motion picture world. Chip was athletic and tall and not unhandsome. He photographed well and his income as a struggling engineer was inadequate, so when Helene forced Super World to give him a test, he was ripe for anything which would make him a part of this fine, rich, sunny life. His success was instantaneous and amazing, unless you knew Hollywood.

One more dramatic flop would have ruined Helene, so she moved right in with Chip, into big Westerns. He soon found out about her, but she had started him and there he was, stuck with her. It was pure, unadulterated hell from then on.

She hogged the screen. She upstaged the hired help from grips to extras. She chased Lydia Gray clear out of Super

World because Chip began taking out the starlet, and when she did that Chip rebelled and there was a terrific scene.

Then they were enemies and she told everyone that she had made Chip and he had turned on her like a snake. She remained in Westerns because she could not get back into anything else, and by staying she made everyone about her miserable. She had a term contract and enough name power at the box office to hang on, and Chip Farrand nearly lost his mind—and Lydia.

Helene had a stand-in named Jean Laverne, a blonde girl who seemed able to lap up Helene's abuse and even, upon occasion, rip back at her employer. Nobody knew much about Jean—she was just a stand-in.

They were shooting on *Pioneers of Fate*, with Nason directing, and as usual there were daily rows. Farrand had tried to keep out of brawls, but Nason needed help, and for the good of the picture and everyone in it he had to stand up to Helene. They had some wild arguments, and one particularly bad affair the day of the murder.

The reclining board looked like a padded ironing board with arms, and was used by people in costume who could rest against it without disarranging costume or makeup. Between takes Helene used it. When Helene was working, her stand-in preserved her identical decor by leaning back upon it. They were using Stage One, indoors, that day and there were a hundred people in the dancehall scene. They thought Jean was asleep on the reclining board and wheeled her out under the lights to set a scene.

Nobody knew Jean was dead until the Kleigs picked out the throwing knife protruding from her ample bosom.

The worst part was that anyone could have thrown the knife. In a Western company there would be maybe a dozen adept knife-throwers around. It was

something they all fooled with to pass the time, throwing at targets, and Chip Farrand was more expert than most. It was fun.

FARRAND paused to explain to the stout detective that moviemaking, especially with Helene Holland around, was not fun. It was the most miserable of all dull professions. Engineering was far more exciting and interesting, and if the pay was anywhere near decent. . . .

Dolan grunted his disbelief and Farrand desisted, knowing no one would believe him. He went back to his recital.

Jean, it seemed, had no family, no ties of any kind. Nobody cared who killed Jean—or even if she was killed. Super World could and did spend a lot of money here and there. *Pioneers* was finished without interruption. The whole thing blew over.

"But they think I did it," Farrand said tautly. "I know what they're saying. And that fool Helene Holland is going around with a bodyguard and telling people she's afraid of me."

"So you didn't do it. So no one is bothering you," muttered Dolan. He shook his head, but the two green bills lay before him. He touched them and said, "You had this big blowup with Helene Holland? People heard it?"

"She called my girl—Lydia Gray—a name. I lost my head. I threatened her, all right. Then I went to Jean's funeral—and Flick Farbstein might have seen me there. That jerk sees everything. Anyway, Farbstein's in my hair—follows me around. I went down to where Jean used to live and he followed me there."

"Farbstein? B.G.'s boy? He's a shmoe," said Dolan. "I dunno how I can help you, though. I jest can't understand you not likin' horses and cows. . . . A thousand bucks, huh?"

"Just check on the girl first," urged

Farrand. "Call me at this number. Just do what I ask—that's all."

He escaped before Dolan could return to the livestock question. He went down to the parking lot on Second Avenue and drove back up to Beverly Boulevard and cut across Fairfax and up Laurel Canyon and wound around until he came to the little house atop the hill where Lydia Gray lived with her mother.

Lydia came out with her coat over her arm. She got in the car and said, "You look beat. Let's go out to Malibu. Nason wants to see me."

"He always wants to see you," said Farrand, "and he thinks I killed Jean."

"You've got to get over that," said Lydia quietly. She was a small, slim, dark girl. She photographed better than she really looked, but she looked good enough. "It won't do you any good, Chip."

"There's only one way I can get over it," he said.

"Just let it die. I know it's not fair. But Super World is determined that it stay dead and buried."

"Like Jean's dead and buried. Only I'm walking around and being suspected of murder and I can't stand it. I won't stay in the business, Lydia. I won't—"

"Maybe you shouldn't stay in it," she said quietly. "Maybe neither of us should. How did we get in it, Chip, you and I?"

"Like most of them. By accident. And it's a darn good living. I'm not knocking the picture business. There are plenty of good people in it. Super World thinks it is doing right by covering this up. Nason does too. Nason hinted that Helene should have been knocked off. In their own peculiar way, they mean well. It's screwy, that's all."

They were silent, driving up the winding way of Sunset. The Pacific came into view, burnished by the late sun. It was lovely and there could be peace, he thought longingly. There must be a way

to peace and some sort of normal living with a girl like Lydia.

With Lydia, if he could clear up the mess, he amended. Right now it was spoiled by Helene and her rottenness and this appalling thing which hung over him. But Lydia was good, and if he could only resolve it all. . . .

He was watching the wrestling on his television screen when Dolan called. The detective said, "Chip? Damn if you ain't pretty lucky, after all. They got a ticker on that dame. Her right name is Gertrude Malone—Gertie. Up in San Francisco they had her on suspicion of traffickin' in heroin and she jumped her probation and they lost her. They can tell you somethin' up there."

"I'll fly up tonight," he said. His pulse was pounding as he reached for his hat and coat. Action was what he needed—and this looked like decisive action.

At the airport he had time for coffee. As he finished his cup, a man slid onto the stool alongside him, scowling, a small, ferrety man with a sharp manner and a whining voice. It was Flick Farbstein, who knew everything before it happened—but didn't always know the basic truth behind mere facts. He said, "Now what good you gonna do Super World in Frisco?"

"I've asked you pretty to keep your nose out of my business," said Farrand. "Now I'm telling you, once and for all—"

"Your business is Super World business," shrugged Farbstein. "You're just a piece of property to me. B.G. is sore you were at Laverne's funeral and snoopin' around her joint. Why can't you stick to playin' around with Gray and behave? Gray's all right. Nason okayed her and we're takin' her back to make you and Nason happy. Now go home and call her and stop all this—"

"Go chase a duck," Farrand suggested.

"If you go to Frisco, I'm going to Frisco," said Farbstein calmly. "I got

orders from B.G." He sat there, resolute.

Farrand said, "They won't like you in Frisco. They don't like anyone who calls Frisco Frisco." He walked out into the night. It was chilly and he shivered, fighting for control, trying to think.

A hangar loomed. He walked behind it. Farbstein followed.

There were deep shadows. He had learned the technique in Western pictures, but he had never really used it before. He held Farbstein with one hand and hit him below the ear with the other.

JOE DOLAN said, "We seen you in *The Duke Rides Again*. Me and the kids. Is it true your horse got killed?"

"They shot him," said Farrand. "Here's what I learned in San Francisco. Gertie Malone sang in a cheap club. She was running around with some characters the police suspected of being mixed up with a dope ring working out of Mexico. They staked out the club where she was working, and one night when she went to get into a car where there was a man waiting, they jumped her. But something went wrong and the man got away. They heard her yell after him, something that sounded like 'Mickey', but that was all. They found no dope on her, the car proved to be stolen, they couldn't determine that she used drugs. So she got probation. She came down here, evidently, adopted that Laverne name—and got herself killed."

Dolan said, "I hear they're gettin' you a new horse to ride."

"I don't want a horse," complained Farrand. "I want a murderer."

"Mickey, huh?" mused Dolan. "We'll ask around. And, well, mebbe I got something. I had 'em check the routine neighborhood calls the night before Jean was killed. Sure enough, she'd had a rhubarb with some guy. Put in the call herself. When the boys got there, she said he had

scrammed, but they said she looked scared all right. They watched the place all night, but nothin' else happened." He hesitated, then looked straight at Farrand. "Y' know, if Super World hadn't interfered, this stuff woulda come out before. The cops were told to lay off. They had Jean's pitcher and all, only nobody wanted to look at it. You gotta have cooperation from the D.A. to make a case. . . . Now if I was a cop, workin' this case, I'd wanta know how come a killer got on—and off—the Super World lot, where an act of Congress can't get me an' my kids to mebbe see a Western bein' shot?"

Farrand said, "Central Casting! There were a hundred people working that day!"

"Mebbe you could narrow that down," said Dolan. "The cops got a gimmick—they always scan the funeral of a murdered person."

"Farbstein was there," said Farrand grimly. "Farbstein knows all. I'll check that end right away, Joe. Are we getting any place?"

"We ain't fallin' behind. Gee, I wish I could see that new horse, me and my kids. When you goin' to ride him, Chip?"

"Never, I hope!" He went down to the street and wondered why the city of Los Angeles seemed like an entirely different world from the rest of Southern California. He drove out to Sunset Hills, but Lydia, her mother said, had gone to the studio. He decided he might as well face Farbstein—and B.G.—right now.

B.G.'s office was as big as a railway station and furnished like a palace. Farbstein had a lump under his ear. B.G. looked more like a toad than ever. They harangued for what seemed hours, and Farrand managed to hear them out. After a while, B.G. lowered his voice and ended, "You shouldn't have hit Flick. He could sue!"

"You'd fire him if he did," Farrand said. "All I want from Farbstein is a list of those present at the Laverne funeral."

"You mean Super World people?"

B.G. started to swell up again. Farrand spoke sharply, quickly, as few dared speak to B.G. "No list—no pictures. Flick either gives me a list of names of those people and a picture of each—or I take that job in South Africa."

"South Africa? Are you nuts? Who makes pictures in South Africa? And if they do, I'll blacklist you from here to China anyhow. You got a contract."

"The hell with the contract, and even you can't blacklist engineers," said Farrand. "I get the list or I quit."

"Quit? You'd quit pictures?" He stared at Farrand, a man shaken to the core. He said, "Farbstein—give him what he wants. The man is mad!"

"See you in the snakepit, men," said Farrand. He got the names—six of them and the accompanying photographs. He went over to Nason's office and collected Lydia. They hurried to his car and sat in the parking lot while he filled her in and read off the list. "Bart Lansing . . . Miguel Gonzales . . . Fortunato Garcia . . . Cal Tunney . . . Jim Durango . . . Ted Hunter. Why should any one of them want to kill Jean Laverne?"

Lydia said, "Everyone takes it for granted the killer was trying to get Helene. Nobody ever thought to wonder why Laverne was killed."

Farrand said, "I may be a lousy actor, but I saw that at once."

She said wonderingly, "And Nason was just telling me that they made Moriarty, the Assistant D.A., a vice president of Super World."

"To cover me up for a murder I didn't commit," said Farrand bitterly.

A shrill, pear-toned voice shrieked, "There he is! Look out for him, Carl! Don't let him get me! He'll kill me!"

He saw Helene Holland's car then, parked not far away. She was cowering beside a large man with a lumpy face and long, simian arms. Her finger pointed

waveringly but dramatically at Farrand. Her face looked swollen in the bright sun, and there was something wrong with her eyes.

Farrand stared fascinatedly as the big bodyguard lifted her into the car, got behind the wheel and drove the palpitating actress from the lot. Lydia said, "Why, that was—insane, Chip."

"Insane," nodded Farrand. "Or something like it." His head was buzzing with ideas now. He patted Lydia's arm. He was beginning to feel confident at last. He said, "I'll take you for a ride, then to dinner. Okay?"

She said, "Maybe we're all crazy, but it seems to me you feel better just because Helene screamed at you."

"Could be," said Farrand. "It depends on what Dolan can dig from these pictures and names. That Dolan can do more work without taking his sore feet from his office!"

JOE DOLAN put his feet in an open drawer of his desk and said, "You get that stallion yet? My kids drive me crazy askin'."

"I have so far evaded the stallion," said Farrand. "Did you get anything from the names and pictures I gave you?"

"Uh-huh. Miguel Gonzales. The half-Mexican fella. He's been suspected of peddlin'."

Farrand cried, "Miguel Gonzales? 'Mickey' is short for Michael and Miguel is Michael in Spanish! It ties in. Gertie Malone yells after a guy named Mickey in San Francisco—we've got him!"

"Like how?"

"He must be the man. Who else? I'll bet he's a knife-thrower, too. And I'll bet he's peddled heroin to some of our famed stars—"

Dolan shook his head. "In pitchers, mebbe. But not in real life. Not anyplace where there are cops. Not here, where Super World don't want trouble. They'd

just say you were trying to get off the hook by throwin' a curve at a poor extra. Suppose Gonzales did know Gertie in San Francisco, and suppose there was a tieup, why should he murder her?"

"They wouldn't even follow it up? He must've done it."

"Look, it's planted that Laverne was killed because she was where Holland was supposed to be. Nobody but you and me is interested in Laverne. Why should anybody look for trouble? You better go see about that horse. I read in Variety they call him 'White Dynamite.' I sure wish my kids could see you top that horse the first time!"

Chip Farrand sat very still for a long moment, staring out at the unimpressive buildings of downtown Los Angeles. The smog was heavy and every prospect was dismal. Yet an idea persisted.

He said slowly, "All right, Joe. Come out to the studio tomorrow about ten. Bring the kids."

"You mean we can see White Dynamite? All three kids? You mean it?"

"Uh-huh. Be there promptly at ten."

He left Dolan frantically dialing the telephone in an attempt to relay the wonderful news to his home. He went down and got his car and drove out to Lydia's house.

They rode up onto the Santa Monica Palisades and looked at the ocean. After a while he asked, "How friendly is Nason?"

She said straightforwardly, "He likes me. A lot. He dislikes Helene. A lot."

"How about me?"

"He'd like you a lot better if it weren't for me."

"I figured that. Would he go for a scheme that could run me clean out of Hollywood or help me if he thought that's what would happen?"

Lydia said slowly, "I think he'd gamble. He's a pretty nice fellow. I think he'd sort of hope you won out."

"I want a man named Miguel Gonzales on the call sheet for tomorrow. And I want a knife-throwing scene inserted into the script, with Holland on the set. I want Gonzales to be chosen to throw the knife. I'll try to stir up the rest of it."

Lydia said, "You'll get in trouble if it goes wrong."

"Trouble? Maybe. There is always South Africa. They say the climate is fine."

JOE DOLAN proudly shepherded the three children, all in their 'teens, all freckled, homely, suspicious. They did not like Farrand's Eastern accent. They were determined not to show their awe and delight.

Farrand located Gonzales, fighting to control his nerves. The extra was a tall man in his thirties, quite handsome. His grey eyes indicated his mixed ancestry. He had well-shaped, strong hands, Farrand noticed.

Nason said, "I want someone who can throw a knife. You, there. Gonzales."

Gonzales shook his head. "Not me. I couldn't hit a barn door with a shiv—a knife, I mean."

Helene Holland was walking from her portable dressing room. Nason raised his voice, "Oh, come, Gonzales, I know you can throw a knife. I want Helene in this. Let's try a scene, with blunt knives. You throw them at Helene and miss, see?"

Helene Holland stopped dead. Her eyes were wrong again, Farrand saw with excitement. Under the paint, her face went cold and rigid with emotion. She wheeled, choking, "Carl! Carl!" she screamed.

Farrand began working his way nearer to Gonzales. Nason was fine. Nason was saying, "Come, come, Helene, your new stand-in hasn't shown up. I just want to see what we can do with a scene in the woods, where the villain throws a knife."

She screamed, "I won't do it! You can't make me! I won't have knives. I won't have him—Carl!"

The lumpish bodyguard moved alongside her. Farrand was watching her weird eyes. They were fastened on Gonzales, wide with terror.

He had the feeling of progression, then, of moving through a well-directed part. He came close to Gonzales. He tried to get Dolan's eye, but the detective was pacifying the children.

Farrand said in a low voice, "Watch out, Mickey!"

Gonzales wheeled, his shoulders hunched. "Huh?"

"She's murder. She's worse than Gertie."

Gonzales moistened his lips. "Gertie? You nuts, Mr. Farrand?"

"Holland knows," Farrand said, talking out of the corner of his mouth. "She knows the score and she knows you've been tapped. She's been buying the stuff from you, hasn't she?"

Gonzales swallowed, "Now wait a minute, Mr. Farrand. I didn't know you were hep to the snow. . . ."

"Look out for Holland, that's all," said Farrand. "She's no little stand-in. She's a star. She'll louse you up, but good." He thought he could remember lines from hard-boiled mysteries, which he loved. "She'll fix your wagon, Mickey."

He walked rapidly away and went to his dressing room. He got into his cowboy costume as quickly as possible—boots, wide hat, embroidered shirt, tight pants, gunbelt with revolver—unloaded—and neckerchief. He ran back, and Farbstein was waiting for him impatiently.

"What's with this knife business?" he asked. "I got that horse outside and the publicity department is waiting for stills. I got everything set and Nason makes like crazy with knife scenes."

Farrand said hastily, "Holland's just raising hell again. Come on. I'll pose with the damned horse."

The assembled Dolans were staring with reverent delight at the animal.

Everyone had come outside to see if Farrand would get thrown, Chip thought, regarding the large animal.

He looked about for Gonzales. He dared not lose track of the bit player too long. He did not see him. He did not see Helene Holland, either.

He began to sweat in the hot costume, and then it occurred to him that from a higher vantage point he might locate the missing actors in his private drama. He put his foot into the stirrup and went into the saddle.

He had no sooner touched leather than he heard Lydia scream.

The horse bucked, but Farrand was not aware of it. People scattered in every direction. Camera bulbs flashed. Farrand drove heavy rowels into the white stallion's side. The indignant horse tried to bolt, but Farrand choked him down by sheer strength and desperation, checking him around and kicking him toward the frantic sound of Lydia's voice.

She was stumbling from behind the permanent Western street set, pointing with a trembling finger. As Farrand came thundering on the white horse she cried, "Helene! Hurry!"

Farrand hurried. He saw Helene on the ground. He saw some blood. He saw the man in the blue shirt making for the high fence.

Gonzales couldn't get away. Farrand needed only to dismount and call the police. But the white stallion wanted to run, and there was another stunt Farrand had seen practiced by western doubles.

He rode down alongside Gonzales. Too late he saw the man had not thrown the knife at Helene, but held it in his hand. Already Farrand was diving out of the saddle, atop the blue-shirted fugitive.

His last conscious thought was that this scene should have been rehearsed. . . .

The room was white and antiseptic and the bandages did not interfere with holding hands. Lydia sat beside him and

looked tender and admiring. There were too many flowers, but he had a wonderful feeling of relief. He said, "I'm glad Helene wasn't hurt much."

"I knew you was kiddin'," Dolan beamed. "I knew you could ride. My kids'll never forget the way you jumped Gonzales."

Farbstein and B.G. were there, too. Farbstein said, "We got pictures like mad, Farrand."

"I never believed you done it," said B.G. "Remember, I made Flick give you Gonzales' picture? And Chip, we got to replace Holland in *The Duke Rides Again*. And what do you think?"

"Lydia Gray is going to do the part."

"You guessed!" B.G. looked hurt. Then he said, "You're forgetting about South Africa now, Chip?"

Farrand said, "Well, if a new contract could be arranged—with Lydia in it as my leading lady. . . ."

"Just what I said. Just what I suggested," said B. G. "Right, Flick?"

"Yes, B.G.," said Farbstein.

"How about going easy on Helene?" Chip asked.

"She talked to the police and really

nailed Gonzales," Lydia added. "I feel sorry for her."

"Just what I said myself," nodded B.G. "Right, Flick?"

"Right, B.G." They both went to the door. B.G.'s voice rumbled back to those left in the room.

"And you got to get rid of this Moriarty, Flick. He is doing us positively no good. You can't fire him—but get rid of him."

Dolan was beaming at a pink check. He said, "Gee, Chip. A thousand bucks! And I feel kinda guilty. I shoulda been in closer at the finish, only my kids—and my feet hurt."

Farrand said, "You're a great cop so long as you stay in your office. You are probably the greatest stationary detective in the world. Take the thousand dollars and buy your kids a horse."

Lydia said fondly, "You solved it, darling. You saw that Helene was hopped to the eyes when she screamed at you in the parking lot. You thought of going after the killer of Laverne instead of someone who was trying to kill Helene."

"Let Dolan be the detective," said Farrand. "I like it that way."



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CHAPTER ONE

Man With a Gun

I WALKED out to the doorway of the gym with Peggy Clark, saying but-tery words to her, soothing her, even though I knew the fuss she was making was silly. The point was, I couldn't afford to have Peggy quit the gym. Keeping her as a member meant cash to me. Peggy

was one of the best-known sportswomen around town. She owned a racehorse. She was half-owner of a prize fighter. She operated two night clubs.

"I'll see that it doesn't happen again," I said. "I'll have it all taken care of in a couple of days."

"Couple of days?" She whipped around, turning all the wattage of her blue-green eyes on me. "I want it taken care of tomorrow. I simply won't have

people looking in at me when I'm swimming."

I wanted to smack her across her wide, juicy mouth. I wanted to kick her in her shapely shins. What I actually did was to say, very mildly, "I'll have it fixed up tomorrow."

"Okay." Her eyes tanned me a while longer. With her two-inch platform shoes, her eyes were practically at my level. "I don't think it's asking too much," she said. "This is supposed to be a gym, not a peepshow. Whoever the screwball is who's peeping in at the swimming pool—your janitor or whoever it is—you ought to have him examined."

She whisked her gleaming ermine collar straight and went up the three steps to the door, then she turned back. "I suppose you think I'm crazy," she said, a bit softer than before.

"Not at all," I said generously.

"Well—"

The door opened behind her. A sliver of the cold February night knifed in at us. A man stuck his head inside.

"Philip!" Peggy yelled.

He jerked his head back as if she had bitten him. He was a meaty guy, about forty, slightly taller than Peggy, with big shoulders. Me had a heavy, loose-skinned face and dark splotches under his eyes.

"What are you doing here?" Peggy's voice was hard and gritty.

His eyes narrowed. "I wanted to see who's molesting you."

"Go home, will you please?" Peggy said.

"I'm going to put a stop to it," he said.

"It's all right. Now go away." She looked at me, heaving up her eyebrows. "Lord! A protective husband."

He glanced in my direction. "Who's he?"

"This is Dan Morrison, the manager of the gym."

"How do you do," I said, nice as you'd want.

"Why is he hanging around you?"

"Good Lord, are you starting that stuff again?" She stepped close to him and gripped his arm. "Listen, you—this jealous act is getting on my nerves. It's got to stop—understand?" Her voice shrilled up a rung. "You damn fool!" Her hand suddenly slid to his overcoat pocket. "What's this?"

The man jerked back, shoving at her arm, but her hand was deep in his pocket.

Peggy's hand came out of his pocket with a revolver. A gleaming blue steel .38, fresh from the store.

"What did you think you were going to do with this?" she asked.

"It so happens you're my wife. Does it seem so strange that I don't want anybody molesting you?" He sounded like a bad melodrama.

"The only one who's molesting me right now is you," Peggy said. "Now, go away, will you please?" She put the gun in her bag.

"All right—make a joke of it." He flipped a vicious glance at me, then turned, yanked the door open and went out.

Peggy stood in the doorway a while, looking after him.

"Imagine living with that for the last five years," she said. "Now do you see why women poison their husbands?"

"Nope," I said. "Never could figure out why they poison them. So messy. Why don't you just get a divorce?"

"How do you know I'm not doing just that?"

"I don't."

"The dope's jealous," she said. "Picture that. You know what I've got a mind to do?" She looked me over carefully. "I've got a mind to take you out—really give him something to be jealous about."

"No, thank you."

"Oh, you're spurning me?"

"I never go out with married women whose husbands carry firearms."

"You wouldn't have to worry. He

doesn't have enough brains to pull the trigger."

"Doesn't take much brains."

She smiled with half her mouth. "Okay, softy," she said. She pulled the door open and swung herself out.

I GOT on the phone first thing the next morning and arranged a council of state on the matter of Peggy Clark and the phantom peeper. I called Stan Harvester, who ran the gym's finances, and Artie Semple, who owned the real estate—the gym was the basement of his hotel.

Stan Harvester arrived first, about 9:30 A. M. He brought some new supplies with him. I went out to his car and helped him lug them in.

Stan Harvester was a quick moving, tight-knitted longlegs, with a free-swinging smile and a liking for gymnastics you don't often see in a man pushing fifty. He had taut, tanned features—good-looking, if you liked the looks of leather.

He settled down on the cot I kept in my office for first-aid emergencies. "A peeper is a very unhappy case," he said. "You feel more sorry than sore at the guy."

"I wish Peggy Clark could be that philosophical," I said.

"Look here—the woman doesn't swim in the nude, does she?"

"No, she wears a suit all right. She's just touchy about being seen, for some reason."

Hard heels clacked outside bright clothes flashed along the glass partition separating my office from the hall—and into the doorway stepped Artie Semple. Artie was five foot two *with* elevator shoes; he had a small, acorn-shaped head with a slight afterthought of chin.

He slid into the chair on the opposite side of the desk and took out his ostrich-skin cigarette case. "Okay, Morrison," he said, "what's all the grief about?"

"As I was trying to tell you on the phone," I said, "Peggy Clark came into my office and complained—"

"Peggy Clark?" Artie Semple's head jerked up. "You didn't say Peggy Clark when you talked to me."

"You didn't give me a chance. Well, Peggy Clark came in and said somebody's been peeking at her while she's in the pool. Somebody from the men's locker room. You see, it's possible to stick your head out the window of the locker and look into the first window of the pool."

Artie shook his head. "That's the craziest thing I ever heard—a hard guy like Peggy Clark screaming because a man peeks at her. This can't be the same Peggy Clark I got in mind."

"It's the same one," I said. "I think she's going through a siege of the jitters. I've seen her taking pills. My guess is she goes swimming to loosen up her nerves, and she feels more relaxed if nobody's around. And she's paying plenty to have the pool to herself."

"So what do you want us to do?" Artie said.

"I'd like to put ventilators on all the windows in the pool. That'll prevent anybody from looking in. Besides, it'll keep drafts out—I've had complaints about that, too."

Artie shook the ash of his cigarette neatly in the center of my desk. "Who's doing the peeking?"

"I'm told by Brownie, the janitor, that one of the members has been hanging suspiciously around the windows in the man's locker—a guy who teaches out at the University."

"What's that?" Stan Harvester looked as if he had just been jolted off a speeding car.

"I said Brownie said he saw this professor—"

"What's his name?" Stan said quickly. "Pierce?"

"That's right. How'd you know?"

Stan leaned back on the cot. He ran his spread fingers slowly up and down his thighs. "I knew something was queer about that fellow the first minute I saw him," he said.

"You're going around with professors, Stan?" Artie asked.

"My daughter. She took an anthropology course with him," Stan said, weariness soaking through his voice. "Next thing I knew, she was dating him. The kid's just past twenty—he's at least twice her age. I got a sour feeling about him from the first minute. That radio actor's voice. Even my wife didn't like him, and she likes everybody. So that's why the kid's been hanging around here so much lately!"

"Hey, look," Artie said, "let's give him his money back and get rid of him." He was chewing a cigar.

"I'd rather wait till I know more about it," I said.

"I know one thing," Stan said, standing up. "Wilma's going to have to stay out of here." He picked up his hat. "This palling around with strange men is a lot of excitement to a girl, a lot of fun—until it winds up on the police blotter."

Stan started toward the corridor. Artie stood up and stretched and turned to follow him.

"Hey, what about those ventilators?" I called.

Artie heaved his little round shoulders in a miniature shrug. "Oh, put them in and send me the bill. Always glad to do something for Peggy Clark." He walked out.

Things were going good that afternoon. There was a crowd in the boxing room watching Tommy Clegg, Peggy's fighter, work out. Lots of activity in the pool and on the handball courts. I took a breather and stretched out in my office for a minute. I closed my eyes.

"Wake up, little boy blue," somebody said.

I OPENED my eyes. I looked at a rich green landscape, very close to me. It was made of taffeta. I followed it upward, valley and hill, until I came to a pink-skinned face—plump, man-eating lips—big blue-green eyes.

"You're even cuter when you're asleep," Peggy Clark said.

I got up on my feet.

"Keep your seat," she said. "Don't act as if I'm a lady."

She sat down on the chair beside my desk, showing more of her calves than I thought was possible with those long dresses. "Thanks for arranging something about the windows," she said.

"How did you know?"

"Artie Semple phoned me."

"Oh. Thoughtful of him."

"Yes. Of course, he took the credit for thinking it up—said I ought to reward him by dating him."

"Sounds fair enough."

"Wouldn't I look cute with little Artie under my arm? Now, you—you're more my size." She bounced me a plump smile. I took it without a quiver. "Look, Danny boy," she said, her voice abruptly climbing up to business, "I've got a little proposition for you."

"Please—I'm only a young fellow."

"Seriously, I've got a job for you. It's about my fighter, Tommy Clegg. He's coming along too slow to suit me. With all the stuff he has, he ought to be up in the big time, instead of fighting for peanuts in semi-windups. The whole trouble is that partner of mine." She made a face like heartburn. "Mike Kopper's ruining the kid. Building up his weight, trying to make a slugger out of him, making him heavy-footed, when anybody can see the kid's a natural boxer and ought to concentrate on speed. Am I right?"

"From what I've seen, I think you've got something."

"Of course. Now, what I want to do is get rid of Mike Kopper and have you

take over. I've watched you handle some of your boxing classes. I think you can make something out of the kid."

"Thanks, but I've already got a job."

"This won't take any extra time. Don't you see? Tommy trains right under your nose anyway. I'll pay you fifty dollars a week plus ten percent of the net."

The beast in me began to stir. Money. Money to pile up for the big day when I'd buy my own gym.

"Well..." I said weakly.

She stood up. "Come on—let's have a look."

I followed her across the hall into the boxing room. She pushed through the crowd and got close to the ring. Tommy Clegg and his sparring partner, an old, minced-up veteran, were resting in opposite corners. Tommy was a broad-beamed boy with a beautiful selection of back muscles. It was a shame you couldn't always see him from the back. From the front you saw little rat eyes, a nose that spread sadly into both cheeks, and a mouth always open in dull surprise.

Mike Kopper was on the apron of the ring, whispering into Tommy's ear. Then he leaned down and rang the bell. The two fighters moved out slowly, half-heartedly, like chorus girls at a burlesque show. Tommy got in a few good socks, but he missed as many as he landed. I could see what Peggy meant.

"They don't need a bell," Peggy said. "They need an alarm clock."

Mike Kopper yelled at Tommy, and the boy put on some speed and roughed up the other guy, and then Mike flicked the bell and the fighters parted cordially.

Mike walked toward us, both hands stowed deep in his pants pockets, as if he didn't trust his fingers out in that crowd. He was a pudgy, middlesized man with a flushed face and thin, frantic lips. He always looked as if his vest were too tight.

"Well?" he said. "What do you think now?"

"Wonderful," Peggy said. "Just wonderful, the way he beat up that old man. That's his father, isn't it?"

Mike's shoulders hunched up slowly. "All right, I'll wait till you get the wise-cracks out of the way."

"Listen—you're making a punk out of a good boxer," Peggy said sharply. "I'm sick of watching it. I might as well tell you now I'm dropping you."

Mike's mouth curled up at one corner, like a leaf in a fire. "Oh, you're dropping me, are you?"

"That's right. You'll get the details tomorrow. Come on, Dan." She walked out. I trailed along, feeling vaguely mean.

"Now, wait a minute," Mike said, hurrying into the hall. "You know you can't break that contract."

She went into my office and put on her coat. "We'll talk about it tomorrow. I'll be in tonight for a swim," she said, and paraded past Mike to the front door of the gym.

Mike watched her go. Then he turned and leaned crookedly against the doorpost of my office. "Boy, was I a sucker," he said. "Signing those papers."

He waited for me to register horror.

"When she first came along and offered to set up a summer training camp," he said, "you know what I thought? I thought she was just one of those rich clucks who do things like that for a thrill. But when she pops up with papers. She's got to be co-owner, she says. No papers, I tell her. So she starts crying about how is she going to prove to everybody she's in the fight racket? Giving me those big, innocent eyes."

I took my gabardine coat off the clothes tree.

"Say," Mike said. "She ain't trying to ring you into this, is she?"

I put on my grey felt and snapped the brim down. I went out into the hall and yelled for Brownie. He came out of the equipment room, straightening his fuzzy

white hair, holding a basketball he was repairing. "Take over—I'm going out to dinner," I told him.

Mike Kopper pushed a thumb against my chest. "Listen, Joe Jerk—if you're thinking of getting mixed up in this, forget it. First of all, she can't shove me out. Second of all, for your own good, you don't want to get tied up with that woman. She's poison."

"Thanks," I said, heading for the door. "That's a very inspirational talk."

But what I was thinking was, *The man's right.*

CHAPTER TWO

Breathless Lady

IT WAS close to 10 P. M. when I got back. Brownie was waiting in my office. "That professor's in now," he said. "I want you to go out there and see for yourself. I don't like that woman claiming I was peeking at her." His white eyebrows huddled angrily.

"Forget it, Brownie. Tomorrow we're going to fix the windows and then nobody's going to be sore at anybody."

"Okay, then." His eyebrows grudgingly relaxed. "Say—you know who else is here? Mr. Harvester's daughter. Out there by the bulletin board. You know what he said about her coming here."

I walked out into the hall. Wilma Harvester had been hanging around the gym ever since I came there, two years ago. A cute little black-haired eighteen-year-old, she had immediately decided she was in love with me. When I explained that a twenty-seven old man was too close to senility for a youngster to play with, she took revenge by sneering at me and showing off her boyfriends around the gym. Most of the time I liked her. Sometimes I wanted to spank her. This was one of the times.

She was standing near the front door,

half hidden by the big bulletin board.

"Come out of there," I said.

"Go away," she said in a low voice.

I grabbed both her shoulders and yanked her out. It wasn't any feat of strength; she didn't weigh more than 110. She swung at me, but I pinned her arms to her sides.

"Look, kid," I said, "your father doesn't want you around here any more. Why don't you go home and curl up with a good book and a glass of milk?"

She tried to struggle out of my grasp, swirling her long, lank, black hair. "Why don't you mind your own business, you big gorilla?" she asked.

"This is my business, kid. I know the men who come here. Some of them aren't nice."

"But won't you protect poor little me?" she mewed, wrinkling her little upturned nose at me.

The front door gasped open behind me—traffic sounds blared in. "Well!" said a woman.

The door closed. I let go of Wilma and turned. Peggy Clark looked down from the landing three steps above me.

"Am I intruding?" she asked.

"Come right in—it's not a private party," I said.

Peggy's eyes slid over to Wilma and cooked her. The girl handed it back, with all jets turned on. I was a non-combatant; I stepped out of the line of fire.

"I'm going in for a swim," Peggy said, shifting to me. "I'll be wanting to see you afterwards."

"Well, I had something—"

"At ten forty-five," she said. She descended the three steps like Cleopatra stepping into her barge, and went down the hall, all sails flying. Wilma laughed.

I escaped into my office. I knew when I was outclassed.

I spent the next half hour going over the gym's financial books. About 10:30, the long, loose figure of Dr. George

Pierce, associate professor of anthropology at the University, drifted past my door. A moment later, I heard his voice raised in wan surprise.

"I was just driving by in Dad's car," I heard Wilma say. "I thought you might want a lift home."

"Awfully kind," Pierce said.

"Unless you'd rather go with that woman," Wilma said.

"What do you mean?"

"You certainly seem interested."

I heard the silence tingle. Then it erupted with baritone laughter. "Come, young lady," the professor boomed, and the rest of their conversation was lost in the noise of the opening door.

When the quiet came back, I began to notice how tired I was. I had given five calisthenics and judo classes that day. It was time to close shop.

I got up and walked down the hall to the ladies' locker room and knocked on the door. Nothing happened. I knocked again. I pushed the door open slightly and coughed—

A clatter of feet—a bang against a metal locker door—a body scrambling out of sight behind the row of lockers—

A man.

I rushed inside. I ran up the aisle, between the benches. There was no way he could escape. "You might as well come out!" I yelled.

"I might as well," said Mike Kopper, stepping into the aisle. His thumb dangled nonchalantly from his vest pocket.

"What are you doing in here?"

"Nothing. Just waiting to talk to Peggy. You scared me, walking in like that. Dumb of me to run."

"Cut out the cute stuff, damnit. What were you fiddling around with that locker for?"

"Fiddling around? What do you mean?"

"Get out of here." I grabbed his shoulders. "Get out of here and don't come

back. If anything's missing out of any of these lockers, I'll have you slapped in the jug so fast—"

"Don't be a jerk. If you think I took something, search me."

"Go on, get out!" I said. I was getting mad.

He gave me a wormy look and walked away down the corridor, going slow to preserve his dignity. "Joe Jerk," he said.

I walked in the opposite direction, to the swimming pool, and pounded on the door. "Closing time!" I shouted. I drew a blank. I pushed the door open and waited for Peggy to scream. Nothing happened. The place was empty. The lady had sneaked out on me.

I stamped back to my office and grabbed my coat. I slapped my hat on, went into the hallway and called Brownie.

Then it hit me. How could the lady possibly have gone out without my seeing her?

And then I was running back to the swimming pool, yelling something meaningless. I rushed through the door, skidded to the side of the pool.

Pink and wavering in her tight black bathing suit, her hair floating like seaweed, Peggy Clark was on her back under eight feet of water.

"I'M SORRY this had to happen to you, Morrison," said Sergeant Harry Redmond of the homicide squad—but he didn't mean it. He loved his work.

Redmond was a big, ruddy slab of beef, loud and happy. This wasn't his first visit to the gym. He had come in half a dozen times before to take a workout or a tour through the steam room. Once I helped him brush up on his judo.

"You should of known better than to let her swim without a guard on duty," he said, propping his chair back against my filing cabinet. "That's against the rules, isn't it?"

"It was a private arrangement," I said hopelessly. "It wasn't actually a public pool when she was using it."

"That's not going to look so good in the papers. What'd she want to swim by herself for, anyway?"

"She never told me. I thought it was simply because she was nervous. But now I think it was something else. The first thing I noticed when I pulled her out of the water was that big scar on her thigh. Looked like a burn mark. She was a pretty self-conscious woman—cared a lot about how she looked to men. I think that's the reason she didn't want anybody to see her in her bathing suit."

"Maybe." Redmond made some notes in a small red-covered book. "Let's see now. We got Mike Kopper, this Professor Pierce, and the girl, Wilma Harvester, the only ones here during the hour before you found her. Right?"

"Except Brownie, the janitor."

"Brownie?"

"William Browne."

"Where does he live?"

"Right here. Sleeps in the equipment room."

"Okay. Now—who do you think might have a reason to hold the lady's head under water?"

"You still insist somebody killed her?"

"Look, Morrison—" he leaned forward and patted my knee consolingly—"you think it's bad publicity if it's murder, but you don't know people. They're peculiar. Soon as this hits the papers, you'll be swamped with new members who like publicity."

"You're a great comfort, Redmond."

"Well, keep talking. Who do you think might want to push her head under water?"

"Nobody. There've been some funny things going on around here, but nothing that'd make you think of murder."

"Tell me about the funny things."

I told him about the ruckus between

Peggy and Mike Kopper. I told him about finding Mike in the ladies' locker room. I told him the silly story about the peeping professor.

Redmond burred happily as he wrote it down in his red book. "Good stuff—all good stuff," he said, as if I were pouring drinks.

"I'd like to go home," I said. It was past 3 A. M.

"Sure—couple of minutes more." He worked up a flame in his cigarette. "Who was the lady holding hands with lately?"

"I don't know. She never confided in me."

"No boyfriend ever call for her?"

"Nobody I ever saw."

"Unusual. The lady had quite a reputation around town for always having somebody on the leash."

"I don't know a thing about it. Except that her husband was jealous." I told him about Philip Clark visiting with a gun in his pocket.

"Good—good stuff—"

Crrrang—the damned, jangling, wrangling telephone—lord, I was jittery.

"For me," Redmond said.

He picked up the receiver. "Redmond . . . Yeah, doc. How's everything . . . It is? Well, I didn't expect exactly that. Thanks for staying up. See you around noon." He hung up. "Okay, Morrison, you can go get your sleep now."

I shook the knots out of my back.

"Poisoned," Redmond said. "I should of thought of that."

When I came down to the gym at 8:30 the next morning, there were a couple of cops at the front door, and a couple of homicide squad men fishing around in the ladies' locker room for fingerprints. Brownie came out of his room, holding up the story he had clipped out of one of the papers.

I read the thing. It was hard on my stomach. It said the detectives guessed suicide. Redmond was playing it cozy, but

the story still made the gym look bad. We *had* let her swim without a lifeguard. Prospective members mightn't like to join a gym that let people drown.

A little before 9 o'clock, my phone rang. The voice talked up a fog of words before I recognized Mike Kopper.

"I'd appreciate it if you didn't say nothing to the cops about my being in the locker room," he said demurely. "You know how it is—they'd think maybe I had something to do with this . . . this business."

"Didn't you?"

"Now look, Morrison, let's be serious. I don't want to get mixed up in this investigation for nothing. First thing you know, I'd lose my license. You know how this State is."

"What were you doing in the locker room?"

Nothing came over the wire for a while. Then he said slowly, "Okay—I'll tell you. This is strictly between me and you. I was trying to get into her locker. I admit it. I wanted to get her keys and get into her house and find the papers I signed. The woman was trying to finagle me—you know that. I was just trying to get what's mine."

"Good-by," I said.

"You ain't going to say nothing?"

I hung up.

The phone rang again a minute later. "All right, wise guy," Mike Kopper yammered. "I asked you like a gentleman. Now I'm telling you. Don't say nothing to the cops—understand? If you so much as let out a peep, you'll be a very sick guy. Understand?"

"Wonderful how tough a man can get with a telephone," I said, and hung up again.

Stan Harvester came in a half hour later. He had a rolled-up paper under his arm. He dropped down on the emergency cot and gave me a scowl. "Why didn't you phone me?" he asked.

"What was the point of spoiling your night's sleep?"

"So kind-hearted." His mouth twisted painfully. "My sleep was spoiled anyway. My daughter brought home a banged-up car at one A. M.—the dragging fender woke us all up. Go ahead, Morrison—tell me the story."

I told him about finding Peggy and pulling her out and trying artificial respiration till the medics came.

"Stupidest thing, letting her swim by herself," Stan said. "I'm not blaming you. Artie and I should have said something yesterday. What are they going to do—make us close for a while?"

"No. As soon as they get fingerprints we can open."

We sat there, wafting gloom at each other. After a while, Artie Semple came puffing in. "I just got up—just saw the paper—whoo! Almost swallowed my grapefruit spoon. What's the story for gossake?"

I told it over again, with all the details. I was getting good at it.

Artie took it with blinking eyes. "I only got myself to blame," he said. "Opening a gym! Craziest thing I ever done. I have to go into the gym business. Now look at me. I'm in the corpse business."

He wandered to the doorway. "If you need me for anything, I'll be upstairs," he said. "Lying down."

ABOUT mid-afternoon, Sergeant Redmond came in. He scattered his big hellos over Harvester and me. Then he asked me to take a ride with him. "Some papers to sign," he explained.

I followed him out to the black sedan he'd parked in the alley behind the gym. Redmond plugged the car into a hole in the traffic and headed down Broad Street. "How did Harvester come to get into the gym business?" he asked.

"This bottom floor of the hotel used

to be a restaurant," I explained. "It lost money. Artie Semple, who owns the hotel, hit on the idea of converting it to a gym. He paid for all the alterations, then hunted for somebody who would equip the place and run it on a fifty-fifty basis. He ran into Harvester, who had just got out of politics and was looking for a quiet way to make a living, and sold him on the idea."

"Did Harvester have anything to do with Peggy becoming a member?"

"Not that I know of. She just came in one afternoon and I signed her up. What are you getting at?"

"I'm trying to figure out why this guy Harvester came to City Hall at eight-thirty this morning to tell us he used to know Peggy Clark."

"That's interesting. Is that all he had to say?"

"He said she asked him for political favors a couple of times two or three years back, when he was in politics, and once he did something for her—helped her get a liquor license."

"Not hard to guess. If he'd had anything to do with the woman, the chances are you'd find out sooner or later, so he let you know ahead of time."

"I don't know. The guy's too relaxed. I'd of liked it better if he'd of been nervous about it."

"Can't please you guys."

Redmond grinned as far as his gums. "Ain't it the truth?" He let the grin fade away naturally before he went on. "Atropine sulphate. Ever hear of it?"

"New kind of drink?"

"High-powered poison. One of two things happened. Either Peggy took it on her own hook, or somebody else planted a capsule of the stuff in with the nerve medicine she was taking. Now you know and I know she didn't commit suicide. She'd of picked a more comfortable place than the bottom of a swimming pool to die in. So we're left with

Number Two: Somebody planted a phony capsule in her pillbox. Somebody who borrowed a key out of your desk or else picked the lock on her locker. Check?"

"Or planted it in the pillbox outside the gym," I said.

"You're still trying to move the crime out of your place?"

"Sure."

"Well, okay. Peggy could of been given the business in the gym or someplace else. We'll try them all out. Let's start with the gym. Who knew where you kept the keys?"

"Brownie, the janitor, Stan Harvester and Artie Semple."

"We'll dust your desk for prints. You don't mind if we print you? We got to eliminate your prints."

"Thanks for dropping me off the suspect list."

"You're not off pal—you're just not near the top."

He turned the auto into Pine Street.

"Where are you taking me?" I asked. "I thought you said you wanted me to sign some papers."

"I didn't want to do any talking in front of Harvester. What I'd like you to do is give me a hand. We're going to this professor's house."

He stopped the car before a trim little three-story house with a green plaster front. I followed him to the steps. He pushed the bell. "I like to quiz professors," he said. "I always learn new words. Use them to amaze my wife's friends."

The door opened. Dr. George Pierce stood in front of us, modeling a luscious maroon jacquard robe with satin lapels, glossy enough to see your face in. He was a tall, dark, gaunt guy; he looked like a backwoodsman trying to pass as a Park Avenue wolf.

"I'm Sergeant Redmond from detective headquarters," my playmate said. "This is—"

"Won't you come in?" Pierce said. His voice was deep and operatic. We walked through a brief hallway into a square living room. It had a shallow brown rug, three stuffed chairs, a couple of small tables. There was a fireplace, with a heap of cold ashes.

"Excuse me, gentlemen—I'm in the midst of my bath," Pierce said. He walked to the L-shaped stairway.

"Hey—hold on," Redmond said.

Pierce went up the stairs. "Couldn't talk sensibly unless I cleaned up. That hot classroom. . . ." He was at the top of the stairway. A moment later we heard a door close.

Redmond stared at me. Then his face relaxed. "A nut," he said happily.

He started prowling around the room, looking under the chair cushions, kicking up the sides of the rug, flipping through magazines. I took a walk myself. I went through a open doorway into the kitchen. There was a small refrigerator with a streaky door, an open dish closet, a sink with two small glasses. I bent close. A smell like port wine. One glass had a lipstick mark.

I went back to the living room. Redmond was poking into a black wooden cabinet, filled with fancy wine and liqueur bottles. "Not an ounce of honest drinkable stuff in the lot," he said, hefting a bottle of Cheanti.

I took to the stairs. At the second floor landing I heard the moist roar of a shower behind a door to my left. I tiptoed to the front of the house. The master's bedroom. A plain walnut dresser. A double bed with one pillow. A closet. I opened the closet door. Two coats, a row of suits—heavy on tweeds.

I went back into the hall. I passed the bathroom and opened the door of the rear room. I looked into murk. The window shades were down. I reached along the wall, found the switch. A pink bulb glowed in the ceiling.

I was looking at a museum.

Lining the wall at my left was a solid phalanx of pictures—all female. After a while, it struck me that everything in the room was female.

"What's all this?" Redmond said from the doorway.

I was looking at a photo showing half a dozen dark ladies standing by the seashore. A typewritten caption said, *Congo women*.

"Look at that," Redmond said over my shoulder.

I WALKED along the wall. There were Dahomey girls, Samoan girls, Maori girls, Eskimo girls. Girls who pierced their noses, girls who tattooed their backs, girls who tattooed their fronts—

"Gentlemen!" The professor stood in the doorway. Water dripped from his coarse, brown, sofa-stuffing hair. He held his fabulous robe close around him. "You surprise me."

"Just admiring your collection," I said.

"You happen to be looking at America's finest private collection dealing with female anthropology."

"Female anthropology is my favorite subject," I said.

"If you're seriously—"

"Now, look," said Redmond, "you know why we're here."

Pierce turned to him. "Yes, I know. A very great shock. If there is anything I can do."

"Now we're talking," Redmond said. "Let's go downstairs where we can do it without competition."

We followed Pierce to the living room and sat down.

"Okay, professor, you can start," Redmond said cheerily.

Pierce aimed his sights at an anonymous point on the wall. "I have no conclusions, really—I didn't actually know the lady."

"You talked to her?"

"Once."

"Just tell me—" Redmond said gently—"what you found out when you watched her swim."

Pierce didn't jump. He didn't even twitch. "She had a scar on her thigh. Evidently that was why she was so reluctant to have anyone watch her swim."

"And why were you so interested in that?"

"I was trying to find out why a dominant, strong-willed woman should be so abnormally shy. It didn't fit in with the rest of the picture I was building up."

"Look, professor," Redmond said, "let's start at the beginning. Just what were you trying to get at?"

Pierce took in a heady swig of air. "Very well—if you wish, I'll explain. As you probably know, I have been studying the anthropology of the female for many years. Before the war, I spent some time in New Guinea, studying the Tchambuli tribe. A very strange people, by our standards. The women there control almost everything.

"Now, the question is: What is the origin of this strange condition of female dominance, so different from the arrangement of other groups? Can we find the explanation in the childhood or environment?"

"We'll be getting around to Peggy Clark pretty soon?" Redmond asked.

"Certainly. Now, as you know, in America we have a male-dominated society. But along comes a woman like Mrs. Clark—a woman who operates businesses and dominates the men around her. What is the cause for such a phenomenon? You see the importance of discovering the answer. It would give us an idea of how the temperament of the adult is formed."

"Wonderful," Redmond said. "Now, about you and Peggy Clark. . . ."

"I tried to arrange an interview with Mrs. Clark to question her about her

childhood. She misunderstood my purpose; she refused to see me. Then I tried to learn what I could by observing her about the gym. Her abnormal shyness in the matter of swimming confused me, but I learned the reason for that: mere vanity.

"Now, of course, this unfortunate accident has ruined my entire investigation." He sounded hurt, cheated.

Redmond tossed a questioning glance at me. I batted it back. I couldn't help him.

"Well, thanks, professor," Redmond said. "A pleasure to talk to you. Just don't leave town without telling me. I'll want to talk to you again."

"Any time," Pierce said.

I followed Redmond outside. He got the car in motion before he tried to monkey around with words again. "A nut," he said. The word seemed to make him feel better.

After a while, he added, "I don't think he had anything to do with it, but I'll put a tail on him, just in case he tries anything else funny."

"I thought you'd take his fingerprints, just in case."

"I did."

"When?"

Redmond's smile was big and rosy. "Fooled you, eh, kid? I'll tell you a secret. You don't always make a man's prints by sticking his fingers in ink and letting him know you're doing it. Sometimes you just steal the glasses out of his sink."

He let me out at the gym.

Cops cluttered the doorway. There were still detectives in the locker room. They waylaid me and took my fingerprints.

I went into my office and sat down. There was no noise from the basketball court, none from the boxing room, none from the swimming pool. The no-noise was enormous, crushing. I wanted something to happen, fast.

CHAPTER THREE

Deadly Girl

A LONG about 6:30 P. M., Wilma Harvester swept into the office, her hefty green earrings swaying like pendulums. "I'd like to ask you a question," she said, swinging into the chair beside my desk.

"Shoot," I said.

"You've seen Mr. Clark. What does he look like?"

I looked at her carefully. Her pale, delicate face was as innocent as a shop-lifter's. "Now, why do you want to know that?"

"Well. . . ." She locked her lips and held a silent debate. "Okay. Some man grabbed me a little while ago, and I want to know if it was Clark."

"Hey—what do you mean, grabbed you?"

"You talk first."

"Well, Clark's about five nine or ten—pretty thick in the chest—a little stoop-shouldered—"

"Does he have a big nose?"

"Not especially."

"Well, I think the nose was a fake anyway, just to disguise him."

"What in the world happened? Where?"

"Down near Rittenhouse Square—near Clark's house. I was walking away from there, and this car comes alongside, and the man jumps out and grabs me. One hand around my stomach and one around my mouth. Trying to pull me to the car. I bit his hand till he let go, and then I let out a yell, and he jumped back in the car and beat it."

The way she told it, it sounded like a picnic, but my insides were woozy.

"Listen, kid, this is the last time you go walking at night. You hear? What were you doing around the Clark house anyway?"

"Investigating."

"Investigating what?"

"Investigating how that woman died."

I held on to my head with both hands. "Look, little sister—there are detectives to do that. They get paid for it. They make a career out of it. You—you're supposed to stay home at night, or go to the library or the ice cream parlor or the neighborhood movie."

"Oh, you're inviting me to the movies?" she said brightly.

"All right, I'm inviting you," I growled. "I'll even pay for your ticket. But stop investigating deaths. What in the world did you think you'd find around that Clark house?"

"Well, I was talking to George—"

"Who's George?"

"Professor Pierce, silly. I was talking to him, and you know what? The crazy detectives suspect him—George. They were over at his house, quizzing him. Isn't that crazy? That's because they don't understand the true nature of the case, George says. You see, it's like this: It's all a case of rivalry. Peggy Clark was acting like a man, running those businesses and all—competing with men. Well, what man would that gripe most of all? Her husband!"

"So your friend George sent you out to gumshoe."

"He did not. It was my own idea."

"And what did you find out?"

"Nothing yet. I spent about an hour poking around the house, but I couldn't get in. Then I decided to call it a day, and I was walking down the street when I got grabbed. I guess Clark saw me nosing around and wanted to find out why I was there. Funny thing—I couldn't hear his steps. I think he was in his stocking feet."

"What did you say he looked like?"

"Well, he was pretty husky—about five ten, like you said. Thick face—"

"Did you get the car's license?"

"No, darn it. I thought he'd torn my coat, and I was looking to see if it really was, and by that time the car was too far away."

"Did you tell the cops?"

"What? And have my father find out, and keep me in at night?"

"Well, you're going to stay in anyway, from now on."

"I'm going back there tomorrow."

I grabbed her shoulder and squeezed all my exasperation into my grasp, until she yelled.

"Look," I said, "a woman has been murdered around here. Do you think it's just a coincidence that somebody grabbed you? Doesn't it enter your fuzzy little mind that somebody might be trying to murder you, too?"

"Me?" Her laugh spiraled up, almost hit the ceiling. "Why would anybody want to murder me?"

"I don't know, kid," I said soberly. "I wish I did." I stood up and took my coat off the hanger. "Come on, I'm driving you home."

On the ride to her house, she badgered me until I promised not to tell her father about her sidewalk battle. But later that night, when I was lying in bed, I got to thinking about the girl roaming around in the long-fingered night, and I saw some nasty pictures of things happening to her, and I decided this was one time when it was all right to break a promise.

I dialed the Harvester number and, luckily, Stan himself answered the phone. I told him the story. He was very grateful. His voice shook. "I'll keep her in," he said. "It'll be a hard job."

"I know. I know exactly how hard. I'd suggest chains, a straitjacket and knock-out drops."

I PHONED Redmond the next morning. "Ever thought of taking a little tour through the Clark house?" I asked. I heard a lot of silence.

"What's the point, Morrison?"

"I don't know—I just thought we'd look."

"No point in it. I'm busy with some other angles, anyway."

"What other angles?"

"Just some other angles."

This could have gone on all day. I hung up and leaned back in my chair and batted some plans around. But I always came back to the same one, the same as Wilma's.

I waited until mid-afternoon to try it. I piloted my jeep to Rittenhouse Square and drove past the house without seeing any activity. I parked, went up and rang the bell a few times. Nobody home.

I left my jeep where it was and picked up a cab and rode down to a locksmith's on Fifteenth Street—a whimsical gent whose sign claimed that his name was Lok Smith.

"My good man," I said, putting on a plushy manner, "I've had a most unfortunate accident. I've walked out of the house without my keys. Will you be good enough to come help me effect an entrance?"

Lok's little eyes swiveled up over his near-sighted glasses and analyzed me. "I leave the building, costs you ten dollars a half hour."

"My good man," I said, "don't talk to me about money."

He grunted, stood up, put on a worn-out grey coat, picked up a tool kit and followed me out.

Lok went to work as soon as we reached the house. He had a tricky little gadget that looked something like a revolver. A little prong on the end fitted into the lock. Then he began pulling the trigger, turning the gadget to the right and left. "Just got to keep doing it till you catch it right," he said.

The door of a parked car opened. I jerked around. A girl stepped out.

"Oh, no," I said.

"Oh, yes," said Wilma Harvester. "Are you having some difficulty with your lock?"

"Yes, but we'll have it fixed right away. Now, if you'll just excuse me—"

"Surely you're going to invite me in," Wilma said, smiling. Her eyes were narrow and pitiless. "Surely you wouldn't want me to bother this workman with all sorts of questions."

"You're in," I said quickly. "The maid's preparing tea anyway—you might as well join us."

Lok glanced up at me. "If there's a maid in there, how come you don't ring the bell?"

"She's deaf," Wilma said quickly.

"Oh," said Lok.

"Now aren't you glad I happened along?" Wilma threw at me.

"Charmed," I said.

Lok rattled the doorknob. "There you are," he said, pushing the door open.

Wilma was up the stairs and inside the foyer before I finished paying him. I closed the door and walked in after her. "Now be quiet or I'll throw you out," I whispered.

"No need to whisper," she said. "He's not here."

"How do you know?"

"I was ringing the bell before you got here."

We were in a long hallway, paved with lush rose carpeting. At the end, a broad-beamed stairway led to the second floor.

"We've got to look for her bedroom," Wilma said. "That's where a woman always keeps things that mean anything."

We passed a big, white-columned doorway leading into a crystal-and-plush drawing room, and went up to the second floor. We walked from front to rear and passed, in succession, the lady's bedroom, a dressing room, a bathroom, the man's bedroom and a kind of office. "I'll start here," I said.

"I'm going back to her room," said

Wilma. "It's scrumptious." She took off.

I was standing in the pleasantest office I'd ever seen. Pale green figured rugs; beige window drapes; bleached mahogany furniture. A desk gleamed in the corner, showing off a blonde telephone. Above it hung two drawings of buildings. I went to the desk and started through it. It was all business. I couldn't find so much as a hint on Peggy's death.

Wilma came in. "Did that woman have the clothes!" she sighed. "Bro-ther! What are they going to do with it all?"

"Did you find anything?"

"There was a Chinese silk negligee that wouldn't be hard to alter—"

"Did you find what we're looking for?" I said with incredible patience.

"Not a thing. How about you?"

"If the woman had any private papers, she kept them someplace else."

Wilma looked over my shoulder. "Say! I know this place. I've been there on dates." She pointed at one of the two drawings on the wall. They were architect's sketches.

"It's the Forty-nine Club," Wilma said. "Sailor's hangout. Pretty rough. They've got a swell piano player, if you can hear him over the noise."

I was looking at the other drawing. There was something about it that bothered me. "Do you know this place too?"

Wilma looked at the drawing. The building seemed to be an ornate, old-fashioned, residential type, with the first floor remodeled into a night-club facade. Across the street was a row of trees.

"Say—you know what this is?" Wilma exclaimed. "This is the place we're in."

That hit me. It whacked the breath out of me.

"Are you sure?" I asked dizzily.

"Come on downstairs and take a look, if you don't believe me."

I unhooked the picture. It had a heavy walnut frame. "Let's go."

I went into the hall and hurried down

the stairs. Wilma trailed after me. "What's all the excitement about?"

I walked out the front door, down to the curb and held up the picture. The girl was right. This was a sketch of the Clark mansion with a garish new face. The trees in the drawing were the trees of Rittenhouse Square.

"All I can see," said Wilma, "is that she was going to turn her house into a night club."

"You said it, kid. Listen—I'm taking this picture with me. If you want a lift anywhere, I'll take you."

"You mean you're finished in there?"

"Right." I set the picture on the back seat of the jeep, ran up the steps, closed the door and came down again.

Wilma climbed into the jeep beside me. "Would you mind telling me what you think you've discovered?"

"I don't know. I'm still trying to figure it out."

"That's right, act mysterious—just to hide the fact you don't know anything. You men are all alike. All except George. He tells me everything."

"Good for him."

"You bet. In case you're interested, I'm going to see him tonight. We'll work this thing out ourselves."

"Look—I told you not to go traipsing around at night."

"Why not? Jealous?"

I clammed up. I wasn't going to get sucked in on any discussion like that. I dropped her off at Thirteenth Street, where she could catch a trolley for home, and then I drove to City Hall. I lugged the picture up to Redmond's office.

"Don't care to buy it," he said. "Got any pictures of women?"

"This," I said, "is an architect's drawing showing how Peggy Clark's house would look remodeled into a night club. Now, here's my idea: This fellow Clark comes from an old Philadelphia family, as you know. This woman suddenly de-

cides she's going to commercialize the ancestral home. Clark says nothing doing. He's got traditions to think about. Ancestors. Relatives. High society friends. She says she's sorry, but business is business. So he gets to thinking how this female has been doing him dirt time after time—soiling the family name, cheating on him—but this is too much. He blows up and goes out and buys some poison."

"That's an interesting story," Redmond said. "Where did you read it?"

"What's wrong with it?"

"Everything. You yourself told me Clark came around with a gun, looking for the guy he thought was trying to wolf his wife. He wasn't gunning for her, was he? So does it make sense that the very next day he should slip some poison in her pillbox? And remember: It would of taken some time to get this poison. You just don't walk in a drugstore and order it; you got to bootleg it some place. It could take days. So you want me to think this guy was dickering for poison to kill his wife and at the same time he comes running to the gym to protect her. Now, does that make sense?"

"Don't you think the guy's attitude could change from day to day?"

"That's weak, Morrison—very weak. By the way—how did you get this picture?"

"I just squeezed into the house and took it."

Redmond shook his head. "That's burglary, kid. You ought to know better than that. You better take it back quick."

He picked some papers off his desk and started reading. "By the way," he said, "the only clear prints we got off the locker were Peggy's and the janitor's, and the only one we got off your key drawer was yours. Looks like you or the janitor did it."

"Thanks," I said.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Wrong Boy

I CARRIED the picture out of the office. I drove it down to my Ninth and Spruce bachelor's quarters. I set it up on my maple bureau and stared at it. It refused to tell me anything new.

When I went to bed that night, I gave it another long stare, thinking maybe I might stir up some interesting dreams. I fell asleep, hopefully. The phone woke me up. I breathed a couple of times, slowly. Then I picked up the receiver. "Hello, damn you," I said.

"Sorry I've got to bother you, Dan." It was Stan Harvester. His voice wavered. "Wilma's missing."

"She is?" I said foggily. My luminous watch dial said 6:10. "Maybe she's on a date."

"She's never stayed out this late before. Something's wrong, Dan."

"Dammit, Stan, I told you to keep her in."

"Don't you think I tried? She took my car without my knowledge. Tell me—did you see her yesterday? Was she at the gym?"

"I saw her during the afternoon. She told me she was going to see that professor at night."

He made a low, painful sound. Then, for a while, nothing came over the wire.

"Hello?" I said.

"She told you she was going to see him?" Stan said dully.

"That's right."

"Good-by. I've got to do some phoning."

I couldn't get back to sleep, so I got dressed and hunted up some breakfast in a sleepy lunchroom. After that, I killed time until eight o'clock, and then went to City Hall.

I found Stan Harvester outside the

Missing Persons Bureau, his eyes shiny and hectic. The cops were questioning Pierce, he told me, but all the professor would say was that Wilma came to his house at eight and drove away a half hour later.

"If they let him go," Stan whispered, "I'm going to trail him."

"Take it easy," I said. "There are too many amateur detectives in this thing already."

"They have a man following me, so I guess it's all right for me to do the same."

I went around to Redmond's office.

"Listen—we've got to find this girl," I said.

Redmond looked at me sourly. "We'll find her—don't worry about that. A girl can disappear, but not a girl and a car."

"The point is, we want to find her before she's hurt." I told him about Wilma's battle with the masher.

"Why didn't you tell me this yesterday?" Redmond growled.

"She didn't want to report it."

"What the hell's the matter with you? Are you so stuck on that girl you can't use your head?"

Heel clacks echoed in the hallway. They sounded like the loudest heel clacks in town. They couldn't possibly be anybody's but Artie Semple's.

I turned. Artie flowered in the doorway. He was wearing his spectacular blue cashmere topcoat. "Been looking for you, Sarge," he said. "Harvester's kid's missing. I can give you an idea where she is."

"What's that—where—is she all right?" The noise came from me.

"All I know is where she is." Artie parked a hip on Redmond's desk. "Drive down Chester Pike. Go past the Baldwin Locomotive Works. I don't know how far—anywhere from one to three miles. Just keep an eye out for a broken-down garage. She's in there."

"How do you know?" Redmond said.

"A certain jerk I know comes in to see me just about a half hour ago, and tells me he's got something to tell me for fifty bucks. I work him down to twenty, and he tells me about the girl."

Redmond grunted. "How did this guy get in on it?"

Artie indignantly slid his hip off the desk. "How should I know? He said he heard it from somebody else in a gin mill. You don't ask a lot of questions in a deal like this—you know that."

Redmond stood up. "I'll check on this myself."

"I'm coming," I said. "I want to check on this, too."

Redmond stopped to pick up two of his boys, and we all went out and got into his black sedan. Redmond whipped it out Walnut Street to Woodland Avenue, then out Woodland through Southwest Philadelphia onto Chester Pike.

We passed a lot of garages beyond the Baldwin plant, all in good condition, then about a mile or two past the plant we came to a shack sitting about a hundred feet off the road, like a tramp hitchhiker. We got out. The windows were too grimy to see through. We walked around the other side.

"Look!" Redmond said.

There, half hidden by a privet hedge, was a dark Buick sedan. Redmond hurried over, whipping out a sheet of paper. "Same license," he said.

The car was empty. We ran back to the shack. The big door wouldn't budge. Redmond slammed his revolver through a window, reached in, undid the latch, then slid his penknife under the frame and lifted it. He climbed inside, his revolver out. I clattered in after him.

I almost stepped on Wilma Harvester.

THE girl was sitting up, her back against the tarpaulins. Her arms were tied behind her; her ankles were trussed up like a calf ready for brand-

ing; a dirty handkerchief was wound around her mouth and neck. Her eyes were turned up at me, big and furious.

My yell brought Redmond running. I took his penknife, got down on my knees and sliced through the ropes and the gag.

"Darn it," she said.

It sounded good. It sounded natural. Nothing had happened to the girl. I felt warmth, a loosening in my chest. I reached for her shoulders to help her up from the ground.

She pushed my hands away. "Darn it, why did you have to come?" she groaned. "Another half hour and I'd have worked the rope off myself. Now you'll start thinking you're a hero."

Redmond prodded the story out of her. She had been visiting Professor Pierce, the previous night. About ten minutes after she drove away from his house, a man crawled out from under the auto robe lying on the back floor and stuck what felt like a pistol against her neck. He made her drive out to the shack, forced her inside and tied her up. As much as she could see of him, he seemed to be the same man who had grappled with her two nights before—even to the noiseless stocking feet.

Redmond made notes of the description. "We'll leave your car right where it is for a while," he said. "Maybe the guy'll come back. Morrison, you'd better catch a cab and take this young lady home."

I went out for another look at the inside of the car. The back door was open; I didn't have to mess up any possible fingerprints. I poked through the auto robe, but there wasn't anything there. Except . . . several chalky streaks on the floor. A pale amber color. I got the glimmer of an idea. I bent down and sniffed.

"All right, Morrison," Redmond said behind me, "let's not mess things up."

"Okay," I said. But I already had some of the chalky stuff on my finger.

I went out to the road with Wilma and we flagged a cab. We settled down for the long ride. Wilma flexed her stiff arms painfully. I sniffed at my finger.

"What've you got there?" she said. "Cocaine?"

"Smell it. Tell me what it smells like."

She warily took a whiff. "Smells like glue. What's the gag?"

"You know what resin is? It's stuff they use in fight rings to keep the fighters from slipping. It smells like this."

"What does that mean?"

"I'll tell you. You started me thinking when you mentioned again that this punk was in his stocking feet. It struck me that maybe it wasn't stocking feet. Maybe it was sneakers. Now that I've found this resin, I'm pretty convinced that's what it was. A prizefighter's sneakers."

Wilma's eyes were big and puzzled.

"Here's something else funny," I said. "Your description happens to fit a prizefighter I know. Tommy Clegg. You've seen him around the gym, haven't you?"

"Yes, a couple of times."

"Now think. Could he have been the guy?"

"Well . . . he could have. This man had thick shoulders, sort of thick face—but there was that phoney nose, of course."

"We'll get hold of him."

"But why would he do anything like this?"

"That's what we have to find out."

We didn't do much more talking for the rest of the ride. I was busy figuring, and she apparently was doing the same. I dropped her off at her home, then taxied down to my rooming house at Ninth and Spruce.

The architect's drawing lorded it over my bureau. I glowered at it. What was it about the damn thing that annoyed me so much? The colors? Those pale blue tiles and glass bricks with concealed pink lights?

Then I got it. It was right there, blazing at me. Blue tiles and pink lights on Rittenhouse Square. A brawling night club on staid old Rittenhouse Square! The City Zoning Board would never have permitted it. A little pull could go a long way in Philadelphia, but this was much too raw. Yet Peggy must have thought she could put it over.

I grabbed the phone and dialed Stan Harvester's number. He'd know the political setup well enough to tell me who to talk to.

Stan's voice bounced into the phone. "Drop everything and come on over. We're having a little party—my family has a lot to celebrate," he yelled.

"There's something I've got to check up on first," I said. "Tell me—suppose I wanted to open a night club on Rittenhouse Square. How could I get a permit?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Peggy Clark was planning to turn her house into a night club. I just found that out. She must have been looking for help in getting the thing okayed. Maybe she asked somebody to fix it up for her and he told her it couldn't be done. So maybe she tried pressure—maybe even a little blackmail."

"Good lord, where did all this come from?"

"Just out of my head."

"I don't think anything like that happened."

"What do you mean?"

"I just don't think it happened. Dan, if I were you, I'd drop the whole business. Let the detectives handle it. That's their responsibility."

"Stan, what do you know about this?"

His voice was a whisper now. "Listen. There was a man who was helping her on zoning matters. A hotel owner." He paused. "You see what I mean? There's no point in stirring things up—getting ugly sounding things in the papers."

"Thanks, Stan." I hung up. I looked

once more at the pink-and-blue drawing. Then I put on my hat and coat and went out and grabbed a trolley to the gym—and Artie Semple's hotel.

Artie came to the door in a pair of dark green silk pajamas. "Come on in, klunk," he said, and walked back to his bedroom and flopped into bed. "Come on—don't be bashful," he called. "Just my afternoon snooze."

I went in and took a chair near his bed. "I've got something interesting to tell you," I said. "I've found out who kidnapped the girl."

"Who?"

"Tommy Clegg."

I was looking for something to pop in Artie. All that happened was that his eyebrows went up slightly. "You seem to've found out that Tommy gave me the tip," he said. "I won't ask you how you found out—that's your business. But Tommy got the story from somebody else. He didn't do the kidnapping."

"I'm afraid he did. This is too much of a coincidence." I told him about the resin in the car.

"But it don't make sense. If he did it, why would he come and tell me about it?"

"Because he wanted the girl to be found. Because this wasn't a real kidnapping." I still couldn't get a rise out of him. I talked faster. "No serious kidnapper would have tried to hide the girl right on the main highway. The whole stunt was pulled off to cross up the cops."

Artie shook his head. "You really think a dope like Tommy Clegg thought all that up?"

"No. He was just hired to kidnap the girl. Hired by the man who killed Peggy."

"So what are you going to do?"

"I don't know," I said carelessly. "Maybe I might mention it to the cops—let them work on Tommy and find out who hired him."

Artie showed as much interest as a cat at a dog show. "So okay."

"Just thought you might want to know."

"I got my own worries," Artie said, and he turned over in bed and gave me his green silk back.

I walked out of there a very befuddled man.

ABOUT fifteen minutes later, a slim, drooping figure glided past the glass wall of my office. It moved into the doorway. It came across the room.

"Why aren't you home helping your parents celebrate?" I demanded.

"Don't fight with me, Dan," said Wilma in a tiny voice. "I can't take it."

The girl didn't look so good. She seemed to have gotten two shades paler.

"What's the trouble?" I asked.

"I'm scared, Dan," she said.

I stood up and walked around to her. "Scared of what?"

She looked up at me—a little kid caught in the bottom of a well. "My father and I had a terrible argument. He got sore. He ordered me not to see you again."

"How in the world did all this come up?"

"Just after you phoned. I mentioned about the two of us going together into the Clark house. He got so sore. . . ."

"Your old man's right. If he doesn't want you to talk to me any more, it's because he knows a wolf when he sees one."

"No, Dan, that's not it . . . I'm afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

Her eyes flickered down, then climbed back up to me. "I've been thinking the last few hours about the kidnapping. About how queer it was. Especially about how I got the car. My father always hated for me to drive at night. Any time I wanted the car, I had to beg and beg. But last night, he said, 'You want the car? Take it.'"

I had a slight dizzy feeling. "You told me you sneaked away with the car," I said.

The girl's face wavered. "No, Dan. He told me to take it. You see . . . he wanted me out in the car . . ."

You hired a dope like Tommy. You sneaked him in the family garage and hid him in the back of the car. Then you gave the girl the keys. A perfect setup. But the man who hired Tommy was almost certainly the same man who killed—

Wilma scrambled up. She must have seen something leap in my face. "Oh, Dan, that doesn't mean he did it!" She wrapped her arms around me and drove her face into my chest.

"Of course not, kid." I broke away and picked up my hat and coat. She was after me, grabbing my arm. "Where are you going?"

"I'm going to take care of a few things."

"I'm going with you."

"No, kid. You're going to stay right here and rest up." I walked her across the room to the cot. "Lie down here. Lie down and close your eyes and relax."

"You're coming back soon?" she asked.

"Soon. You just close your eyes. Take a nap."

"You promise you'll be back soon?"

"I promise."

I walked quietly into the corridor. I felt as if I had just been in a hospital ward. I walked outside and got into my jeep. I drove into Broad Street, thinking about a guy named Stan Harvester. A guy with a sense of humor and a warm way with people. And a good family man. That was probably the key. Once, in a reckless moment, he must have got tangled with Peggy Clark, and he'd been paying for it ever since.

I parked outside my Spruce Street haven and walked up the murky stairs to do the sorry thing I had to do—turn the architect's drawing over to the detectives.

I unlocked my door and went to the bureau. I picked up the drawing.

"Don't move."

There was scarcely any change in Stan Harvester's voice. A slight tautness, a slight shrillness—but still the familiar, slow-moving voice I liked.

"Who else knows about this?" he asked.

"Knows about what, Stan?" I asked.

"About this picture—about her plan."

"Nobody, Stan. Now, let's talk this over—"

"Don't turn!" he gritted.

(Continued on page 129)



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DETECTIVE
25c **TALES**

IF I SHOULD LIVE

By Dorothy Dunn

IT HADN'T happened. It couldn't have happened. It was just another one of those nerve-shattering nightmares that had been robbing him of the six hours' sleep he needed so badly each night.

Pretty soon he'd wake up as usual, sweat soaked into his crisp black hair and beading his face. He'd wake up exhausted, with the flat taste in his mouth, the sour prospect of another day to be got through on the strength of a stiff back and the lingering memory of the bad dreams—dreams in which he killed and ran.

There was always the running at the end of the dream, sometimes in his pajamas down Randolph, sometimes with a towel draping his middle, sometimes in the blue-striped shorts with the webbing at the back.

Never in his clothes. He had never dreamed that he was running in his grey suit, in the heavy brown brogans that he usually wore in rainy weather. That is, never before had he dreamed it that way.

But that's the way it was in this dream. Grey suit, white shirt, the one with the tab collar, the green knitted tie, green plaid socks, and the heavy brogans.

The shoes held him back, slowed him down. He must have run barefoot through his other dreams, because he couldn't remember the sensation of his feet touching the ground. The shoes made a big difference. His feet felt like lead, and it seemed to take all his strength to lift them off the slick, rain-filled sidewalk. There were occasional puddles that he must have ploughed through, for there was a dampness to his ankles, as though the plaid

socks were soaked and were being slapped by wet trouser cuffs.

He was having trouble breathing, too. His lungs ached and there was that pressure over his chest that usually woke him up when the chase had gone far enough, when he had taken all of the dream he could stand.

He'd wake up soon. He'd groan and reach out for the lamp switch to flood his room with reality. He'd prop the pillows against the headboard of the bed and lean back, lighting a cigarette with numb fingers, orienting himself to a new day as he smoked it. He'd lie there, the dream still fresh in his mind, trying to figure out what might have brought it on, trying to recapture some of the details that were already slipping away from his conscious mind to bury themselves again in the mysterious subconscious state. By the time the cigarette was finished, his power of recall would be finished too. Another day. What things had to be done today? He was tired. Nobody ought to wake up this tired. What was wrong? Poor circulation? Eating dinner too late? Food too rich? Worried about Joan still? Wanting her still, wanting her so deep down inside of him that he didn't even know it when he was awake?

He'd tried to be his own doctor and had come up without a diagnosis every time. Worry about Joan? That was silly! You don't worry about a dame that has grabbed herself off a twenty room house and a million dollar marriage!

And want her still? Want her after all the cracks she made about the little apartment that had taken all of his savings to furnish? Want her after all the nagging



she had done about his sixty-a-week job? She'd kept him awake complaining, and had often left him so raw and ragged the next morning that he lived in constant fear of making costly mistakes at the teller's window. Maybe it wasn't much of a job, but a guy had to be awake, had to be accurate, had to balance out at the end of the day.

Want her after listening to a year of her yapping, after seeing the set lines of her unhappy face day after day?

That was the silliest diagnosis of all. He wanted her about as much as a guy wants a record player that does nothing

He was dreaming again of a man who killed and ran in a night that was made for murder—but this time, he knew, he would wake up and find himself dead!

except enumerate his faults and his incompetence every time it's turned on.

The happiest day of his life was the day she'd told him she was divorcing him. "Good luck, Joan. Rodney Tait has enough money to keep you happy. Evidently that's all you want or need. No contest, baby. It's all yours. I'll even dance at your new wedding."

He had danced, all right. But not at the swank reception. He had gone out for a private celebration, smiling like a kid in his first pair of long pants, like a girl on her first date, like a country boy on his first walk through the big city. He stood there on the threshold of a new life, smiling because of a freedom that was sweet. He could find himself now—his real self, not the dwarfed image that his wife had constantly showed him. Not his wife any longer. His ex-wife. It was all over. It was a special moment for him.

He had started in a bar near the bank, had worked his way through the loop, and had finished up at a night club with a cute girl named Irene who had kept telling him what a swell guy he was. He couldn't remember the end of the evening, and Irene had faded into the obscurity of the last drink and had gone off in a taxi back to wherever she had come from, which could have been anyplace. He'd never see her again, but he'd never forget her.

There were lots of girls like Irene, but she would always be a part of the happiest night he'd spent since the year he'd lived with Joan. What a night! What a good night it had been, freedom singing in his heart like Kate Smith, his own ego seeping slowly back into focus. And they had laughed a lot. He'd almost forgotten that people laughed.

He hadn't been just a bank teller that night, just a no-good sixty-a-week man with no future. He'd been his real self—Bill Edwards, twenty-seven, working at the bank for peanuts, but with plenty of

hope for the coming years. *Keep an eye on that Bill Edwards, fellows. He's a smart young man who's bound to work up and go places. Great personality, too.*

Still want Joan, when his hope was beginning to come back? Unthinkable. He wondered how he'd ever fallen for her in the first place. What a sap he'd been! And what a sap Rodney Tait had been to take over where he'd left off! Of course Joan was pretty and before you lived with her you thought she was the sweetest little bundle that was ever wrapped. But it was all gift paper and fancy ribbons. Inside was that biting tongue that could tear apart a man's self-respect. In spite of the soft blonde hair, the skin as creamy as ivory enamel being stirred in the can, there were the things she said to a man.

HE WISHED he'd wake up. This running through the rain in all of his clothes, in his heavy brown shoes, was going to wear him out, leave him limp as a rag in the morning.

He'd been running for hours, it seemed. Through the night, through the rain. His chest was shot through with stabbing pains and his mind was whirling with neon signs, traffic lights, places that he'd passed. The Blackhawk, the red crooked-letter flash of the House of Eng, the diamond brilliance of Michigan Boulevard, the wet green of Grant Park, and always the half-faces of people jerking around to watch him run. A jumble of faces flickering before his eyes, jumping into focus, fading out too quickly to be really seen.

His ears were ringing, too, and he knew he'd wake up with a headache. He could still hear the horns blasting at him, the laughter of people behind him, the shouts, the meaningful shouts that kept him running faster and faster. And underneath all the sounds was the faint wail of a siren that had climbed up his spine with an echo of fear that exploded against his brain.

He'd heard the bells then, the clang of trains, the whoosh of engines, and the clatter of the I.C. Station in Grant Park.

He writhed inside, knowing the sweat was breaking out on him now, seeping from his face into his chair. He struggled to bring himself awake, and it was like a game. The dreams always seemed so real, and yet, even in his sleep, he had possessed one contact with reality that knew it was a dream. This time it was different, just as being in his clothes was different. His one thought-thread up to the conscious state was nagging at him, telling him it hadn't been a dream at all, that no dream could be this real.

He didn't seem to be running any more. But he couldn't move. It had turned into that kind of a nightmare. He fought to change his position, to reach out for the lamp pull, for a cigarette.

The cigarette of recollection, of orientation. What had to be done today? Make more than sixty a week to hold Joan? No, Joan was Mrs. Million Bucks now, rolling in the long green. He'd seen her coming out of the Palmer House at noon one day, soft fur coat that shimmered so expensively, diamond-studded ears and all. He'd watched the sedan drive up, the chauffeur standing by so the queen could enter. She must have had cocktails with lunch. Bill knew the stiffness of her walk after a few. He'd looked down at his best suit in disgust. He'd thought of the quick hamburger he'd grabbed at Pete's Steak House, of the dull hours in his little cage at the bank.

That had been payday. He'd left work with a fat wallet in his pocket and he'd passed up the movie he'd intended to see. He made the rounds, wishing he'd find Irene. He didn't, but at the Glass Hat he found Kathy, and he took her to the Palmer House and spent at least half his salary.

The next night, he drank alone at a place called Simon's, and he met a nice

bunch of fellows and discovered that he was lucky at cards. He discovered that money made life more exciting. He spent his poker winnings on a new suit and then he took Kathy out again. He took her to Don's, got high, and spent the rest of his salary.

But he wasn't worried. He could take a small stake and get into another game and come out with enough to run him for awhile. Unlucky at love, lucky at cards!

Then he'd started having the nightmares, the crazy dreams of running. Like this one tonight. Running like a crazy man through the streets of this town that he intended to own some day. Small time, huh? Joan thought he was small time, without the guts to make real money. He'd show her! And he'd have it before his hair got grey, before his middle bulged like Rodney Tait's!

He thrashed about with the urgency of getting up and being about it. He'd get sleeping pills after this. Then he could keep his head on during the day, keep his eyes on the cards at night. He wouldn't be going around with that sore feeling in his back, worrying over trifles, jumpy and inefficient.

He was awake now and he wasn't running any more, but he couldn't get his eyes open. He wanted the lamp on and he couldn't move his arm! Panic hit him all at once. He opened his mouth and began to scream. He knew it was too loud, but he couldn't help it. He screamed for somebody to turn the lamp on. "The lamp! The lamp!" The shrill sound echoed in his head over and over. Then it faded out.

THE lieutenant took Joan Tait's arm and led her out of the emergency ward. She was crying a little.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Tait. We had to stop him before he got on that train. Higgins aimed for a knee, but he stumbled and it got him in the spine. We dropped him

just outside of the I.C. Station. What a chase he gave us!"

"I know. I heard the radio flashes. Poor Bill! I thought he might regain consciousness, and I knew there wasn't anybody else to come down. I felt that I just ought to do it."

"Poor Bill! You'll pardon me, Mrs. Tait, but poor Bill tried to walk off with half the bank, and he shot the watchman on the way out. And he'd been stealing small amounts for weeks. Not only that, he was trigger-happy. He threw a shot at us before Higgins fired, you know."

"I know, but that's what I mean. Bill wasn't the criminal type, Lieutenant. He was too weak, too scared of his own shadow. And he had absolutely no ambition. I tried to snap him out of it, to put some starch into him. I tried for a solid year, but he didn't even have the nerve to ask for a raise."

"Well, I guess he was lucky he didn't live to face the chair, then."

They were walking down the front steps of the hospital now, toward the chauffeur who was waiting beside the shiny sedan.

"Lieutenant, just before—just before he died, didn't he try to say something? You were closer than I was. What was he trying to say?"

"I couldn't quite make it out, Mrs. Tait. It was just sort of a whisper. Sounded like "I am" to me, and I guess it was. That's a crook's word for escape. Anyway, thanks a lot for coming down to identify him. It'll save us some time."

"You're welcome," she said. "Good night."

It had stopped raining but she stepped carefully, hoping that her evening sandals wouldn't spot.

Rodney told the driver to take them on to the Yacht Club and to hurry. They were already an hour late for the party.

"Well, darling?" he asked, holding her hand tenderly.

"He died, Rod. Right while I was there!" She was still shivering and crying a little.

"I'm sorry he turned out that way, Joan. But try to forget it. After all, it isn't your fault."

"I know it isn't," she said. "I can't help it if I stopped loving him after we were married. And even then, I tried to be a good wife. I used to tell him. . . ."

Rodney closed her lips with a kiss.

"You can't make people over, Sweetheart. They're always just what they are. The frantic way he went about his first crime, proves that he was just weak, selfish, and more than a little bit stupid. It was the act of a nervous wreck who was cornered and didn't know how to get out. Now look, Joan, you helped the police get their books closed on him. Don't you think it would be wise for you to close your own books too?"

She leaned against this man who was strong and understanding, who was everything that Bill Edwards had never been and never could be.

"Yes, Rod. But Bill was never mean. He had his faults, but I can't imagine him shooting at people, killing a man!"

"He may not have known what he was doing, Joan. That happens to people now and then. They move around in a frenzied blank. But about that book. . . ."

"It's closed, Rod."

"All the way? Have you got your finger out from between the pages now?"

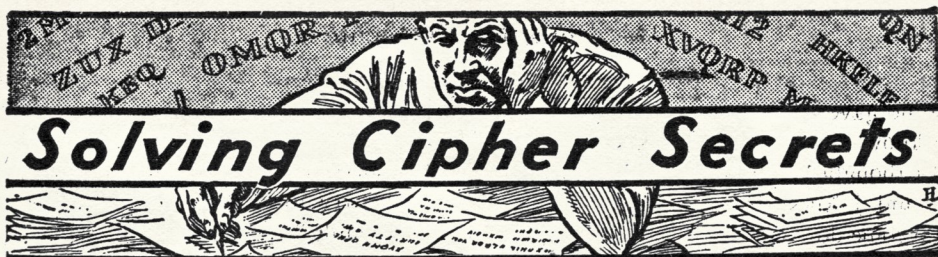
"Yes," she said. "No more conversation about it. Are the Langstons coming tonight?"

"I believe so. And Jim and Dinah. And Gordon and his girl, and the Everetts. Good party?"

"Very good. Rod, did I ever tell you that you're a wonderful husband?"

He nudged into her shoulder and turned his cheek to hers with a puckish grin.

"No. Tell me, Baby!"



Founded in 1924

Article No. 848

M. E. Ohaver

A CIPHER is a secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has used X to represent e, X will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clues. Thus, the affixes -ing, -ion, -ally are frequent. Helpful hints appear in this department each month. Study them carefully.

CRYPTOGRAMS

No. 5295—To the Last Drop. By *Sara. Beginners, try U, used alone, as one-letter-word "a." Substituting in RBUR (-a-), and noting repeated R, pattern word "that" is suggested. Next, RBF (th-) and RE (t-) as "the" and "to"; etc.

DROPFAR RE ZUSUGBORG YADRSOGRES: "NBUR BUZZFAD
NBFA RBF SYZ GESP PEFDA'R NEST?" NYRRK UADNFS:
"RBUR, DEA, YD TAENA UD XOLZYAH RE U GEAGVODYEA!"

No. 5296—Psychic Ciphers. By Blackbird. Singleton L will unlock phrase LVLTR LRF LVLTR. Continue with phrase HTNU NUB, with due attention to repeated digraph NU.

FABLED BGOABDD NUB DKZYPRDYTPKDSC DKOOABDDBF
HTDUBD PA RBBFD PX NUB FABLEBA, TR NUB XPAE PX
XLZSBD PA XLRNLDTBD, KDTRV L JLATBNC PX DCEZPSD
ABOBLNBF LVLTR LRF LVLTR HTNU NUB DLEB EBLRTRVD.

No. 5297—Mechanical Curiosity. By E. D. H. Compare short words CRNH, NH, and RHN. Substitute in NGDHOAG, SHRA, and HDCACRZS, etc., and fill in.

FZFTD NZFT, ACMTR GZSP-NECUN, NGTR LHCRTV ZN
TRVU CRNH XTSN, PHDKU KBUNTDCHOU *KHXCOW UGTTN.
YON STRANGECUT NGDHOAG YTRNTD NH KZJT, RHN NEH
DCRAU, XON LOUN HRT, NECYT ZU SHRA ZU HDCACRZS!

No. 5298—Personal Property. By Vedette. Tentatively identify EVS and FNEV, with digraph EV in common. Next, FNEVPHE and VPOSKE, checking with NO and NOESOE.

NY TPOS NO XPPT YDNEV DOT FNEV VPOSKE NOESOE,
DOBPOS NO EVS *HONEST *KEDESK RDB ZVDOXS VNK
ODRS, FVPUUB PG NO LDGE, FNEVPHE USXDU LGPZSKK.

No. 5299—Hard to Hear. By William Thomas. Arrive at pattern FHUUHAR through short words UBH, UL, and UBHRH. Follow up with 2nd, 3rd, and 4th words; etc.

UBH HEAR EAH FHERU RHKRDUDXH UL FRUUHAR "R"
EKO "P," EKO UBHRH NEAAZ SLLAHRU EKO EAH UBH
GLRU ODPPDNVFU UL VKOHARUEKO LXHA UHFHSBLKH.

No. 5300—Temperamental Temperatures. By *Betty Kelly. Note three-letter NRG following comma. Then complete RU and OR. PYNPURP, with thrice-used P, will follow.

XADDYRV XNTYRGND RU TURBYD ORGOXNVYP PYNPURP US
KYND. TNPV KYND, PALLYD ZYNV XNLY OR *LNK, NRG
HORVYD SDUPV HNP SUDYXNPV SUD YNDTK *PYEVYLFYD.
SYH KYNDP ZYRXY, *XZDOPVLNP OR PEDORB?

No. 5301—Oh, Shucks! By *A. W. Your choice of entry, through HOUR, HROPA, and URITA, checking with TRAPPT, or through affixes OE-, -OEZ, and -UOIE.

KAMFPOXY POEFZOTUOM LOTUIYUOIE OESIPSAT FTOEZ
"TRAPPAL" WIY EFUT HOUR TRAPPT YACISAL, HROPA
"FETRAPPAL" LATOZEXUAT URITA YAUXOEZ TRAPPT!

No. 5302—World's Longest? By Waggoner. Every symbol in the long first word is keyed elsewhere in the message. Note -Z, *ZD, and the 3-word compound. Asterisks indicate capitals.

*RRYHVYULQKRCKAHCARRCECOLAGFKALHTLEPKRRRRYH-
DAZURUECECEGEF, VUVDA-OUCFD-RODDOL KELT, VXRR
HYNO EV *RRYHVYUL, ZNYRR DEKH UH *KYROZ, NOYHZ:
"*ZD. *NYLA'Z *GFXLGF PA DFO KFUDO FYSOR QEER."

No. 5303—Track Event. By †Rebbina. As a suggested entry, try for endings -'C, -CHC, and -FHF, duly noting frequencies. Thus to OSCFH and OSCHGNH.

HONK MACHINE BACHC SMFRIZFRGB ~~PRD~~-CMIH NGXF
PMFR OSCHGNH XIBH EXBFSH *OSCFH ~~OSCFH~~ MAHMFNHI
ORYFGHFR *ZGR-IK-*PGN'C XIZSBFHF NFXINU.

No. 5304—Nice Neck Tie. By Dr. G. Kiln. Final -'T, and high-frequency Z (15 times), will unlock KTZ, for an opener. XFFTZ will then drop into place!

GOFYX VYFTGNS LGDDFBT! EKND0 RYFU YGYZ BFFOT,
TCNDDRKDDH RGTANFXZO, BNPA ZMFPNS PYGVVNXLT.
KTZ TND CZX AGXLUGX'T XFFTZ, ZUEYFNOZYZO OZGPA
YFEZ, EZPGTTZDZO EDGSC-AFFO. LDFYNRH UKYOZY!

WHAT may be the world's longest geographical term is featured, with full English translation, in current cipher No. 5302, by Waggoner. And this recalls three cryptograms previously published here, which employed another jaw-breaker, namely, "Chargoggagoggmanchaugagoggchaubunagungamaug," 43-letter name of a lake not far from Webster, Mass., in southern Worcester County, near the Connecticut state line, and believed to be the longest geographical name in the U. S.

The cryptograms naming the lake here referred to, were by †Arthur Bellamy, in our Sept. 29, 1928, issue; by Wm. Chapman, published Dec. 12, 1931; and by Keewee, in our issue of Feb. 1, 1941. As you probably know, the name of this lake, which is usually conveniently shortened in the atlases, is an Indian word meaning, "You fish on your side, me fish on my side, nobody fish in middle." Try your hand at No. 5302, and the other current crypts! And incidentally, for an interesting experiment with what mathematicians would call a "unilateral rectangle," or one-sided surface, solve No. 5297 by E. D. H., and follow the instructions!

No. X-5306. Flagpole Puzzle. By °Volund.

A monkey and a bird are atop a vertical thirty-foot flagpole. Both are thirsty. To quench their thirst, both drink from a well whose distance from the foot of the pole, on level ground, equals the height of the pole.

In reaching the well, the monkey climbs down to the bottom of the pole and walks directly to the well. While the bird flies straight up a certain distance, then from that point straight along a diagonal down to the well. But the monkey and the bird both travel exactly the same distance!

Question: How high did the bird fly?

Fans with a mathematical turn will enjoy the intricacies of °Volund's "Flagpole Puzzle," No. X-5306. All measurements are in whole numbers, no fractions being used. Hence the puzzle may be solved by mathematics or by geometrical construction with pencil and paper. A carefully made drawing, showing so many feet per inch, would quickly aid in approximating the answer.

John DeVore's "Multiplication Message," No. X-5294 in last issue, conveyed the secret text through three keys: (a) TRICKY LADS, (b) SHOPLIFTED, (c) ANTIQUE BOX. Each key was numbered from 0 to 9. The multiplication was 9304 times 7 equals 65128. There are numerous multiplications of this pattern using all ten digits. Curiously enough, the numbers in some of these are formed by transpositions of the same figures, thus: 3094 times 7 equals 21658; and 4093 times 7 equals 28651; etc.

Newcomers to "SCS," and old-timers again taking up their ciphers, continue to swell the ranks of our Solvers' Club! And letters and comments from these cryptofans will be featured, as space permits, from issue to issue. Muchacho, Canadian cryptofan, returns after being gone 16 years, since Sept., 1934; Aralc, last heard from in Dec., 1941, comes back after an absence of a mere 9 years! °Marcia and °Jay-bee, veteran °Inner Circle team, are now with us again, away 6 years, since July, 1944! And

†Ziryab, gone since July, 1947, returns after time out for 3 years! Welcome back, ye crypto-enthusiasts! And keep your answers and contributions coming, fans, one and all. Each and every answer sent in counts in your solving total. Answers to current puzzles will appear in the next issue of NDM!

No. 5305—Cryptic Division. By †Ian. $N \times N$, with 4-digits in both divisor and product, limits N to 2 or 3. D minus 0 equals U eliminates one of these. The 10-letter keyword runs from 0 to 9.

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N P D P ) R W E U S G ( P D N
          E G R S
          U O R N S
          U O U E R
            D W U G
            O E N D
            U E R O
  
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ANSWERS FOR LAST ISSUE

5283—Executions were formerly held in daytime. But busy pickpockets, pilfering the crowds, forced the practice of holding them at dawn, before large numbers of people were up and about.

5284—Inquisitive patrons bored circus employee with questions. Owner reminded worker that if public were not curious, show would have no business.

5285—African runners pursue elands until they drop from exhaustion, even if chase lasts twenty or thirty miles. Antelope can't elope from hunter!

5286—Police arrest tramp whose pockets and pack yield: shoe horn, pliers, cup cake, over-shoes, pair of glasses, meat-ration coupons, eraser, two fuses, sack of peanuts, bundle of papers.

5287—Most of the twenty-three billion annual transit passengers in our cities are carried by subways, trackless trolleys, buses, and street cars.

5288—Hard-riding contestants, all under eight years of age, provide cute sight at annual Shetland rodeo. Lariat-spinning cowboys, pistol-packing cowgirls ride wildest ponies available.

5289—"New look" brings back nineteenth century era. Leg-o'-mutton sleeves, pinched wasp-like waists, padded hips, bonnets, shawls, and what-nots!

5290—"Tabun," Nazi-developed liquid death spray, deadly nerve poison, almost odorless, effect like snake venom, penetrates clothing, some gas masks. Skin contact kills within minutes!

5291—Pole vaulter, attempting record, runs with great leaps toward crossbar, plants pole, rises gracefully, sails over bar. Crowd applauds.

5292—Storm smote ship. Sole survivor swam shoreward. Safe, slept soundly. Saw sunrise, smooth seas. Searched shipwreck, salvaged supplies. Scaled summit, scanned seagirt shore. Started shelter.

9293—Key: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
L O F T Y S P I R E

All answers to current ciphers will be duly credited in our *Cipher Solvers' Club*. Address: M. E. Ohaver, *New Detective Magazine*, Fictioneers, Inc., 205 E. 42nd St., New York 17, N. Y.

It's BETTER to BURN

*As undying as the diamonds he loved
was old man Guzik—who doomed his
babbling killer to ask for a grave—
and no one to hear!*

IT WASN'T the football season. The first of the big games was still three months away. But dodging through a broken field one of E. Osmond Peabody's sins caught up with him one hot morning in July and threw him for a twenty-four month loss. The penalty would have been more except for the fact he had a very clever lawyer and the insurance company for which he worked was loath to advertise to the business world that one of their supposed crack investigators was nothing but a crook who had been working hand in hand with the underworld for years.

The exact sin that tackled him doesn't matter. There were many on the team, and any one of them could have done as good a job. What does matter was the fact that when the gates of San Quentin clanged behind him, all that remained of that which E. Osmond Peabody had accumulated in twenty years of snide dealing was his belly. Washed into his lawyer's lap were his stocks and bonds and real estate. Gone were the held-back jewels he had put aside as an umbrella against the day that it might rain. Gone were the luscious blondes and the redheads. Gone was his Cadillac car. All that remained were sixty-six dollars and twenty cents and the belly that even two years in a cell had failed to diminish. He promptly steered it to the nearest bar and spent a dollar and eighty cents of his capital to fill it with beer.

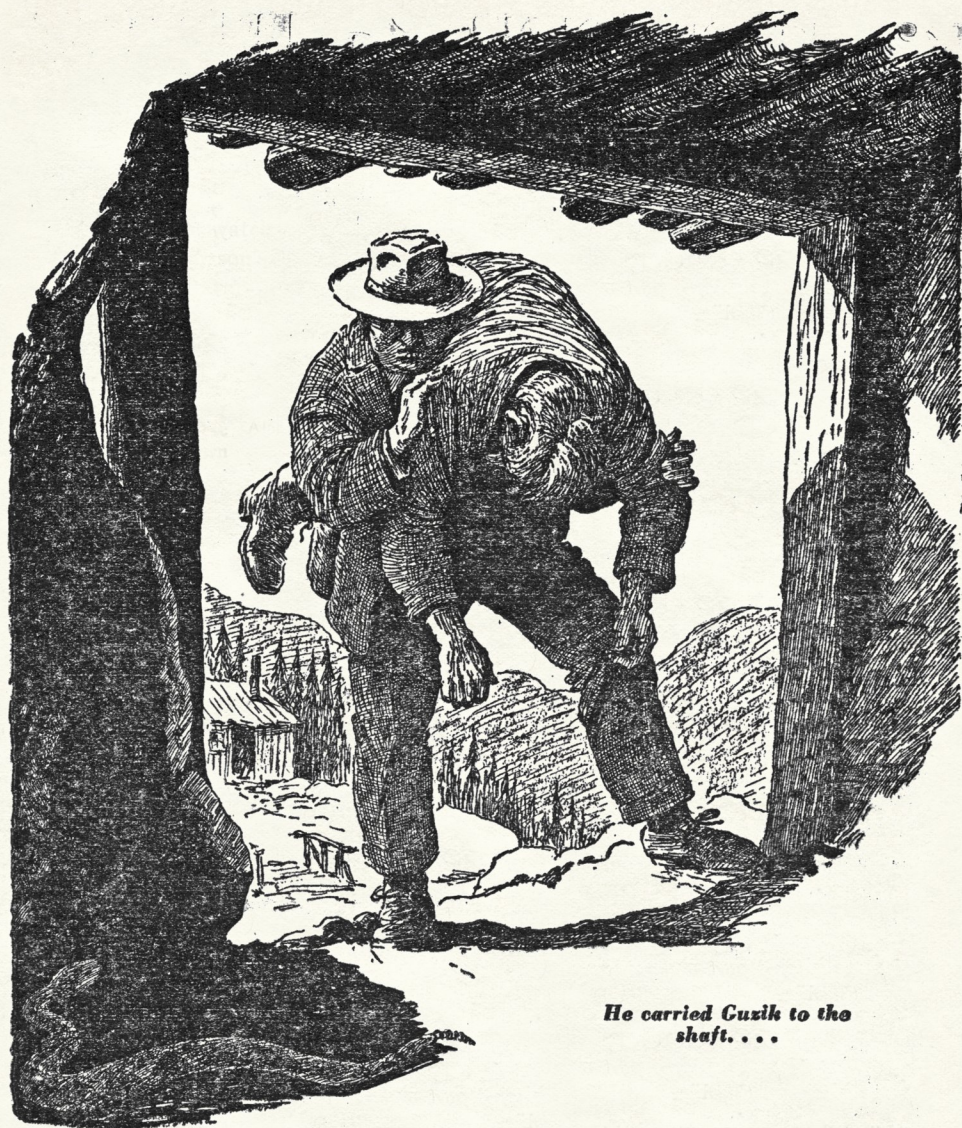
It had been two years since he had had a drink. Mellowed by the beer, he con-

sidered his prospects. They weren't very bright. His license had been revoked even before his trial. No other insurance company would hire him. He had been an investigator so long he doubted if he could hold down any other sort of a job. He was fat and fifty and finished.

Another man would have been bitter. He accepted the fact without rancor. He'd had a good time while it lasted. And it had lasted a long time. Then too, there was old man Guzik and the Shannon string of fire. The necklace to the best of his knowledge, and he had checked with the underwriters, had never been recovered. He knew. The insurance company knew. The police knew. Everyone concerned with the case had known that old man Guzik had the necklace. But knowing it and proving it had been two different matters. Old man Guzik was crazy, but smart. He hadn't stolen the necklace for profit. He had filched it from his own shop because he was in love with perfection and the Shannon diamond necklace was the nearest thing to perfection of its kind.

Comfortably awash with beer, Peabody almost felt sorry for the old man. The resulting scandal and stigma hadn't been any kinder to Guzik than the law had been to him. His wife and family had left him. He had lost his smart shop on Wilshire Boulevard. No wholesale jeweler or diamond merchant in his right mind would consider consigning merchandise to a jeweler all but convicted of stealing a

By John Corbett



He carried Cuzik to the shaft. . . .

four hundred grand necklace entrusted to him by a nitwit Hollywood star who hadn't had brains enough to ask for a receipt.

Peabody reviewed the necklace in his mind. He knew it well. Consisting of forty matched stones and one huge tear-shaped pendant, it was reputed at one time to have been part of the Russian Crown Jewels. He could well believe it. There wasn't a stone in the necklace that,

even hot as they were, wouldn't bring five thousand dollars in the hot ice market.

Five times forty was two hundred thousand dollars. Peabody sweat beer at the thought. Any man, even a fat one, could have one hell of a fine time on that much money. And since his disgrace and subsequent bankruptcy proceedings, old man Guzik was reputed to be living alone in a tiny shack somewhere in a place called Box Canyon. He lifted a finger for the

barman and asked him if he knew of a place called Box Canyon.

"I know of a lot of Box Canyons," the barman said. "Hell, man. California's as full of places named Box Canyon as you are of beer." He set a fresh beer on the bar. "Go ahead. Have one on the house. I want to see you run over."

Peabody accepted the beer but refused to be diverted. Searching his memory, he added, "I think this one is near an old mining town called Elfers."

"Oh, that one," the barman said. "That's over in the mountains back of Yosemite, I believe. Yeah. I know it is. I went deer hunting up there once. Elfers is a sort of ghost town, and there's nothing in Box Canyon but snow and old mining holes and rattlesnakes in the summer."

"Thanks. Thanks a lot," the fat man said. He drank the beer and waddled out of the bar.

TIME was when Elfers had prospered. Time was when Saturday night had found five thousand men in town and there had been an opera house and two hotels, and bars and gambling joints had stood shoulder to shoulder on both sides of the main street.

Now there were only a few stores, two churches, one dirty beer parlor and the rickety old hotel in which E. Osmond Peabody was stopping, ironically, next door to the local sheriff.

The town's only revenue was derived from the few sheep and cattle ranches scattered through the foothills, a few grapestake cutters who worked the higher Sierras, an occasional lost touring family, and the local characters. The town was filled with them, shabby old men leading burros who, after a lifetime of searching, still hoped some day to find gold in sufficient quantity to justify the faith they had kept alive for so long.

Peabody had never been so bored. He was beginning to wonder the wisdom of

his decision. He didn't dare mention Guzik by name lest he later be connected with him in someone's mind. What little money he had was going fast. To date his ramblings through the canyon back of town had been unproductive. Guzik might have a shack in the canyon, but up to now he had been unable to locate it. The barman had been right about the snakes. They, with birds and wild life of all kinds, abounded in the canyon. It was as wild and untouched by the hand of civilization as it had been in the days when the Forty-niners had made history.

Now, on Saturday afternoon, nursing a five cent cigar that smelled rather dead, he sat on the porch of the hotel, watching the few shoppers pass and listening idly to the gabbling old men grouped around Sheriff Winson. Of all the characters in town, the aged sheriff was the most decrepit. He was a gaunt old man with a tobacco-stained white mustache, who could have posed for a picture of Father Time. Peabody doubted if he could find his badge if it wasn't pinned to his suspenders. The old man seldom if ever stirred from the hotel porch. The time and place were ripe for the perfect crime. If only he could locate his victim.

He was considering throwing caution to the wind and asking openly if a man named Guzik was known to live in Box Canyon, when fate, in the person of the erring jeweler himself, intervened.

When last Peabody had seen Guzik, the jeweler had been wearing grey striped trousers and a form-fitting black morning coat that accentuated the smartness of his shop. He had been shaved two days under the skin. His ascot tie had been perfection. His wisp of a mustache had been as black as his dyed hair.

Now he looked like a mountain rat. He was wearing patched blue jeans and his dirty grey flannel shirt gaped open to reveal a scrawny throat. His mustache was full and white and both his beard and

his hair were grizzled. He walked as if punchdrunk, carrying an empty sack and babbling to himself. But there was no doubt he was Guzik.

Peabody eased the front rungs of his chair to the porch and started to get up, only to remain seated as the old man turned into a store and one of them on the porch asked Sheriff Winson, "Who's that *hombre*, sheriff? Don't call to mind seein' him 'round here before."

"Fellow by the name of Brown," Winson told him. "Come in about two-three years ago." He paused and spat. "Bought the old Tildy claim. You know. The one up back of Lone Pine on the branch. Fixed up the shack, they say, and got him a garden and some chickens. Kinda self-sufficient like. Don't come into town but about three times a year to pick up a few staples."

One of the men said something Peabody couldn't hear.

"No, I don't, Bill," the aged sheriff answered. "Two or three city lawmen from down below the Tehachapis did come up and hold quite some long palaver with him right after he bought the claim. But being they didn't see fit to tell me what it was about, I didn't figure it was my place to ask. Couldn't have been nothin' serious. Brown seems like a nice enough old coot." He drew a circle around his temple with a finger. "But he's crazy as all git out. Ain't interested none in mining or cattle or sheep. All he wants to talk about is diamonds."

The man who had asked about Guzik laughed. "He must be crazy if he figures on digging diamonds out of the old Tildy claim. Hell. That hole ain't showed no color since Hector was a pup. Aside, if he hopes to git diamonds out of it he'll have to drill clean through to t'other side of the world. An' then the chances are, he'll come up with a John Chinaman instead of a diamond. Couldn't ever see what anyone saw in 'em no way. All

they're good fur is to look at." He spat.

Peabody got to his feet and walked slowly down the rotting board walk of the old ghost town in the direction from which Guzik had come. The old man was here in Elfers. *And he still had the Shannon necklace.* 'All he wants to talk about is diamonds.' The psychiatrists had a name for it. And so did he. That was Guzik's guilty conscience speaking.

Peabody meant to relieve it if he could. Forty times five thousand dollars. That was more money than he'd ever had, even in the days when he had been stealing it hand over fist.

The walk ended in a pile of termite-riddled boards in front of what once had been a courthouse. The fat man walked on out of town and up the narrow road leading into the green of the mountains.

He knew where the branch was. He also knew Lone Pine. He'd passed both the river and the lightning-shattered tree a half dozen times on his rambles through the hills in search of Guzik. The shack must be cleverly hidden. But if he waited for the other man to return, Guzik would lead him to it.

The setup was a natural. He wouldn't be missed at the hotel. He'd told the clerk that morning that he was moving on, although he hadn't told him when. Guzik had a garden and chickens. He would return from Elfers with a sack of staples. The old man only went to town three times a year. It would be four months before he was missed, and probably spring before anyone in Elfers would think to go look for him. If Peabody's business could be transacted swiftly, he could be on his way by nightfall. If not, well, Guzik liked to talk about diamonds, and Peabody had four months in which to persuade Guzik to tell him where he had hidden the Shannon necklace.

The road pinched out into a trail. The trail grew steeper and finally branched, one fork leading still higher up toward

the timber line, the other fork into Box Canyon. There were more rocks here, rocks as big as a house. The three high rims of the canyon that had given it its name were plainly visible. They were stark and bare. But through the right center of the canyon, following the gushing mountain stream, was a meandering oasis of green. And it was somewhere along the branch that Guzik had his shack.

THE sun rose higher. Heat beat relentlessly down from the sky and up from the bare stone, but Peabody scarcely felt it. He was too pleased with himself. The L.A. police were fools. So were the underwriters. They had written off the half million dollars as a loss and subscribed to the fact that the former society jeweler was crazy. Only he was smart. Only he had been shrewd enough to realize that Guzik hadn't stolen the necklace for its intrinsic value. Guzik loved diamonds the way men love women.

Now and then a rabbit scurried across the path. Once he saw a deer drinking in the branch. Twice he heard snakes rattle. Between him and the sun, the great black shapes of vultures wheeled in never-ending circles.

"You and me, brother," the fat man told one of them. "When the rest give up, we eat."

He had been walking for two hours when he reached the once-huge pine that served now only as a landmark and a limited source of shade. He moved closer to the tree and stopped as a coiled snake in what shade there was lifted its flat head and stared at him with unblinking eyes.

Another man might have killed the snake. There were plenty of rocks handy. Not so Peabody. He had never killed anything or anyone in his life. He didn't believe in killing. Only fools killed to get what they want.

"Okay. You can have it," he told the snake.

Mopping his face with a sodden handkerchief, he looked at the deep patch of green behind the tree. It was easy to see how he had missed the shack before. Even now that he knew it was there, he still couldn't see it. He could see a faintly defined trail leading back through the trees toward the water. He debated a moment, then walked around the tree and down the trail. Outside of the shelter of the trees, there was no place in which to hide. Besides, it didn't matter if he followed Guzik to the shack or waited for him there. There would be no one to see them.

After the heat of the rock, it was like entering another world. It was cool under the trees, almost cold. Ferns and lichen replaced the greasewood and the sage. Squirrels and birds replaced the lizzards and the snakes. The fat man had never seen so many birds. There were blue birds and red birds and jays and crested titmice and chickadees and magpies and larks and industrious red-headed woodpeckers drumming their accompaniment to the symphony of runs and trills and warbling.

Peabody walked on stolidly. He didn't know one bird from another. He didn't care to. His favorite bird was the chicken. And he liked that plucked and fried.

The shack stood in a small clearing a few dozen feet from the foaming mountain stream. Even the fat man was impressed. He was also even more confident of getting that which he had come to get. The former jeweler's love of beauty showed in the work of his hands. An emerald green vegetable patch marched in precise rows down to the stream. It in turn was bordered by carefully transplanted colorful wild flowers and flowering bushes. The shack itself wasn't much. In his hunt for Guzik, Peabody had seen a dozen like it. But this one had been

transformed. A thick mat of climbing roses covered it on the two sides he could see. A flowering vine crept up the poles that supported the porch, to lie green and yellow on the shingled roof. The whole thing looked like a set for some movie.

Peabody sat on the porch and smoked a cigarette. The necklace could be hidden in the cabin, or Guzik could have it on him. His gaze crossed a crude log bridge to a black hole in the rock cliff which rose from the other side of the stream. Or it could be in the old mine. It didn't matter. Guzik would tell him in time.

The birds, seeing him on the porch, surrounded him in droves, cheeping and twittering. Rising, he drove them off.

"Scat! Shoo! Get out!" he yelled.

Guzik probably fed the damn things. Nasty, noisy things, birds. The unscreened windows of the shack were open. The door was cracked. Pushing it open, he walked in and sat in a rocker facing the door. It would be nice to have money again. When he got back to L.A., he decided, the first thing he would do would be to push a stone and then throw a big party. A five thousand dollar party. That would bring them running again. It would also burn the law, who wouldn't be able to figure where he had gotten the money.

A long-tailed green and white bird with an iridescent sheen and a yellow bill perched on the sill of the window and cocked its head at him. Peabody threw the first thing handy to his hand, a sugar bowl, at it.

"Get out of here."

It flew off with a startled squawk, and he resumed his dreaming. Then he would buy some clothes and another car. A convertible this time. And mountains of food. He'd start his way at one end of the Strip and eat and drink his way to the other.

He rocked on, lost in pleasant contemplation, half asleep in the heat only to start to his feet as someone said:

"Hello there."

He expected to see Guzik in the door, but it was empty. Nor was the man in the clearing. He had, the fat man decided, dreamed he had heard some one. But from then on he stayed awake and alert. This was a serious business. In all of his checkered career he had never pulled so important a caper.

It was after five o'clock when the man he was waiting for came slowly down the trail through the trees, carrying a heavy sack on his back. He looked the same as he had in Elfers, with a subtle difference. The former jeweler was no longer walking on his heels or talking to himself.

For a moment it worried the fat man. Then an understanding smile creased his face. He was up against another sharper. The former jeweler was crazy like a fox. He had a jewel mania, true. But money also entered the picture.

Guzik had put on an act. A good one. His pretended insanity was a sham. He wasn't crazy enough to lock up, but he had sidetracked the law and alienated his family. For three years he had lived as he pleased in a mountain paradise with nothing to do but eat and sleep and create the beauty he so enjoyed. And when he decided the heat had cooled off, all he had to do was disappear and take the Shannon necklace with him.

Peabody was shocked by the thought. *Why, the crook! The dirty crook,* he thought.

The jeweler was not only sane but slightly high. As he entered the clearing, the birds that Peabody had repulsed swarmed to his head and shoulders and tried to pick in his pockets. Roaring with laughter, he opened the pack and threw them great handfuls of grain from a sack in the top of it. Then, taking a pint bottle from his pocket, he shouted, "Here's to crime, my fine-feathered friends," tilted the bottle and drank deeply.

Here's to crime. The words echoed faintly from the thin screen of trees fac-

ing the looming cliff across the river.

Guzik was even more amused. "Nuts to you!" he shouted at the cliff.

Nuts to you! The words came back distinctly.

"You dirty crook."

You dirty crook.

Still roaring with drunken laughter, Guzik picked up his sack again and mounted the rickety steps of the shack. Both the laughter and the whiskey strength drained from him when he saw the fat man. There was a flash of recognition in his eyes. Then they went dull. His face went slack. When he spoke, he sounded like the moron he had pretended to be in Elfers.

"Diamonds. That's what I'm digging for. Diamonds. Nice, bright, blue-white diamonds."

His fat face impassive, Peabody said, "You and me both, brother. But cut out the loony act. You don't need to put it on for me."

The other man hesitated briefly. Then the light came back in his eyes. "What the hell are you doing here, Peabody?"

Rocking placidly, Peabody said, "That's better. Kinda pulled a fast one, didn't you, Jake?"

Guzik shook his head. "I don't know what you're talking about."

The fat man told him. "The Shannon necklace." He held out a pudgy hand. "Give."

Stacking the canned goods in the safe on the table, the former jeweler repeated, "I don't know what you're talking about, jailbird. When did you get out of San Quentin?"

Peabody wasn't insulted. "Four days ago."

"And you came to see me right away. You came to see poor old crazy Guzik." Picking a five pound sack of flour from the pack, Guzik carried it over to the food safe and dumped it into a ten pound lard can. Peabody's eyes, as flat and unblinking as a snake's, watching his every move. "How thoughtful of you. But you mentioned the Shannon necklace."

"That's what I'm here for."

Guzik shook his head. "Then I'm afraid you're going to be disappointed. Even the L.A. police have decided I didn't take it. It just 'disappeared,' and poor old Guzik went out of his mind completely over the shame and disgrace."

"I'll bet."

"You can," Guzik said. He stooped to put the can back in the safe, and when he straightened he was holding a .38 in his hand. "In fact, you can be damn certain of it. Now get out of here, you slimy rat, before I plug you!"

THE fat man got to his feet slowly. He was a heel, but he wasn't a coward. And he wasn't afraid of a gun. He had faced a lot of them. "Don't be a fool," he said. "Shooting me isn't going to do you a bit of good." He walked toward the other man slowly as he talked. "All it will do is blow your insanity alibi wide open."

"I'll chance it."

"Why? You may get away with theft. Both you and I have. But you can't get away with murder. Look. Why not play it smart? Turn the necklace over to me.

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"I'll fence it and split the take with you."

Guzik said, "Ha," and the knuckle of his trigger finger whitened.

The fat man stopped where he was. He had no intention of being shot out of sheer nervousness on the part of the other man. Give them time. Always give them time, was his motto.

The former jeweler's voice took on a dreamy quality. "In fact, I think I'd enjoy shooting you, Peabody. I've done as I pleased for three years. I've gardened and slept and drank, occasionally, with no wife to nag me and no business to worry about. But it's been monotonous. Yes. I think I'd like to hear the boom before I take off for far places with strange names." He laughed. "A thief come to rob a thief. That's a hot one!"

Peabody noticed that the long-tailed bird was perched on the window sill again. "You don't intend to shoot in front of a witness, I hope." He nodded at the bird back of Guzik. "That would be silly."

Guzik turned, as the fat man had known he would, and, moving with deceptive speed, Peabody closed the distance between them and brought up his right fist in a blow that knocked the other man off his feet. The revolver hit the floor, and went off. The slug whistled out the window, and the bird on the sill flew off, squawking.

"You amateurs," the fat man said without heat. "You're all alike."

With an effort, he squatted beside the unconscious man and, grasping him by the front of his shirt, pulled him into a sitting position and attempted to slap him conscious. Guzik's head rolled limply with the blows. He wouldn't do any talking. He was dead. Peabody noticed the blood for the first time. The revolver striking the floor had discharged its slug through Guzik's lower abdomen before continuing out the window.

Now he had a body to dispose of. And he still didn't have the necklace. Leav-

ing the body where it was, he methodically tore the shack to pieces, a square inch at a time. He found what he was looking for under the newly purchased flour in the bottom of the ten pound lard can. Even covered with flour it gleamed like liquid fire.

Rinsing it in a pail of water, he admired it for a moment before dropping it into his pocket. Crime didn't pay. Not much. At least it didn't pay rank amateurs like Guzik. The man had sweated for three years for nothing. Thinking of the dead man reminded him that it would be a smart move on his part to dispose of the body. He considered several methods, then decided on the mine shaft.

Carrying the body across the rustic bridge in the last of the waning light, the fat man edged carefully into the shaft and struck a match. Twenty feet in, the shaft dropped at a forty-five degree angle. He carried it to the lip and pushed the body from him. It lunged forward like a thing alive, hurtling down the shaft until it landed with a thud and an ominous rising of rattles.

And that, Peabody thought, is that.

He returned to the shack in the clearing. The birds and the squirrels were gone. The silence was so thick it had weight. The fat man considered moving on immediately, thought of the dark trail through the woods and the snake-ridden rocks beyond it, and decided to postpone his departure until morning.

Opening a can of beans, he ate them cold, then lay down on the dead man's cot and tried to sleep. Sleep had never been further away. He was a city man, and the night noises of the woods and the gurgling of the stream bothered him.

At midnight he gave up trying to sleep. Getting up, he lighted the lamp and spent the rest of the night in the rocking chair, watching the swift-scudding clouds cross the moon. He had tortured and beaten

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New Detective Magazine

many men, but Guzik was the first man he had killed. He didn't like the reaction. For the first time in his life, the fat man realized that he, too, had nerves.

He tried to put the thought from his mind. So he had killed a man. So what? No one could ever prove it. He would never be brought to trial. No one would even know it. Guzik wouldn't even be missed for four months, maybe more. And by that time, this high in the mountains, the snow would be six feet deep, and all trace of what had happened would be blotted out until the following spring.

Toward morning it turned cold. He tried to light a fire in the stove, and couldn't. There were no shavings in the woodbox and he didn't dare step out of the door into the dark. He consoled himself with the thought that, cold as he was, old man Guzik was colder. From time to time he took the diamond necklace from his pocket, but even the fire from the necklace failed to warm him.

He was glad when morning came. He gathered wood with the first of the light, built a roaring fire in the stove, and put a pot of coffee on to boil. With a cup of coffee under his belt, he would be on his way. In two hours he would be in Elfers. In eight more he would be in Frisco. And eight hours after that he would be back in L.A. and the past two years would be blotted out in the bright prospects for the future.

The squirrels and the birds awakened. A great scolding and cheeping began. To silence them, Peabody found the grain and threw out a great double handful. It was then he saw the second pint. In the early hours of morning he had cursed because Guzik had emptied the first one. He was not a whiskey drinker, but there were times when even a beer drinker could appreciate a shot.

Opening the bottle while he waited for

(Continued on page 124)

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New Detective Magazine

(Continued from page 122)

the coffee to boil he raised it to his lips and Guzik's husky voice came through the window—

"Here's to crime!"

THE dropped bottle shattered in a thousand pieces. Snatching the gun from the table, Peabody whirled toward the window, but there was nothing at which to shoot. The dead man had gone around to the other side of the shack. He must have, for his voice came from the window on that side.

"Hello there!"

Cursing, Peabody spun on his heel and emptied the gun—at nothing. There was nothing there. He fumbled frantically in the safe for more shells and found exactly two. Hastily he thumbed them into the gun and raced out of the shack before he realized he was acting like a fool.

Guzik couldn't talk. He was dead.

Or was he?

"Nuts to you," his voice taunted from just beyond the first screen of trees. "You dirty crook!"

His fat face flaming now, Peabody fired the two shots in the gun at the sound and a burst of raucous laughter answered him.

The fat man raced for the screen of trees, then stopped so suddenly he kicked up twin showers of dust. If Guzik was alive, if he had somehow escaped from the mine shaft, the old man was probably well armed.

A woodpecker chose that moment to drum on the metal water-spout leading from the roof of the shack, and Peabody's heart almost stopped.

"It's my nerves, nothing else," he tried to tell himself. "I'm letting the fact that I killed a man get me. I just imagine that I hear his voice."

He retreated to the steps of the shack and looked around him. Nothing had changed. The vegetable garden still

It's Better to Burn

marched in orderly rows to the branch. Roses still covered three sides of the shack. The yellow flowering vine still supported the porch. Red and black and blue and yellow birds still feasted on the dead man's bounty. There was no sound but the twittering of the birds, the scolding of the squirrels.

Inside the shack, the coffee boiled over, and the fat man ran up the stairs to lift it from the stove. Once he had a cup of hot coffee—in rounding the table to get at the stove, he caught the capacious pocket of his coat on the sharp corner of the table—and screamed. It felt for a moment exactly as if a ghostly hand had reached out to stop him.

Tumbling from the torn pocket, the necklace fell to the dirty floor, where it lay, a small blue and white snake, reflecting the rising sun. Snatching it up, Peabody slammed it on the table and returned his attention to the coffee. It was hot and black and strong as lye. He reached for the pail to water a cup enough to enable himself to gag it down, and discovered the water in which he had washed the necklace was scummed with a film of flour.

The pump, as he remembered it, was on the far side of the building. Emptying the pail, he pumped it a quarter full, then could have sworn he heard movement inside the shack and raced around the building and in to find the necklace he had laid on the table—gone.

The blood draining from his face, he forced himself to be calm. He might imagine hearing a voice. But the necklace was another matter. He didn't imagine it was gone. It was. Incredible as it might be, Guzik was still alive, and when he had gone out to get water the old man had crawled in through a window and snatched back the necklace again.

A moment later a mocking laugh proved it.

"Here's to crime!" the voice cackled.



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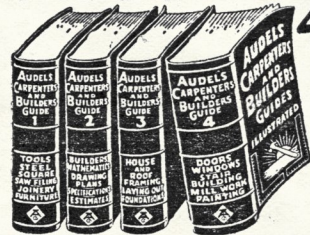
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New Detective Magazine

Holding the empty gun by the barrel, the fat man walked out to the porch. The voice was coming now from the far side of the stream, not far from the mouth of the mine shaft.

Good. He had the old man trapped. And Guzik obviously didn't have a gun. If he had a gun he would have fired by now. The voice continued to taunt him.

"Hello there, you dirty crook!

Peabody crossed the rustic bridge warily, ignoring the gale of raucous laughter pelting at his ears.

"Ha, ha, hah! Hello there, my fine-feathered friend!"

The fat man thought he understood. "The old man is crazy. He's completely out of his mind."

But that still didn't explain how Guzik, badly wounded as he was, had crawled up the forty-five degree angle mine shaft.

Maybe I'm crazy, the fat man thought.

He suddenly had to know. He had to know if Guzik was still at the bottom of the shaft and he just imagined he heard the voice—if it was his own guilty conscience speaking.

The voice was no longer laughing. Warily entering the mouth of the shaft, the fat man struck a match. It was longer and darker and smaller than he remembered it. The match burned down and burned his finger. He lit a second and then a third. He was on the lip of the incline now, but he could only see a scant three feet ahead of him and he was damned if he would descend the shaft. He picked up a stone and threw it. From the bottom of the shaft an angry rattle answered.

Alive or dead when he had thrown him in, Guzik couldn't have left the shaft alive. Slightly relieved, the fat man turned only to hear a second rattle, this one much closer at hand, too close for comfort.

The faint light at the mouth of the

It's Better to Burn

shaft seemed suddenly miles away. He took a step forward and stepped on a rotting pick handle. It was round. It was soft. It gave. As he moved sideways, a dislodged piece of quartz dropped from the side of the shaft and struck his thigh.

Screaming, he ran for the light and across the rustic bridge and past the flower-covered shack without stopping, froth flecking his lips, the light of madness in his eyes, the dead man's voice keeping pace with him.

"Hello there! You dirty crook! Nuts to you! Ha, ha, hah!"

He was old. It was hot. He was tired. Sheriff Winson had tried for an hour to make sense out of what the fat man was saying. He had even assembled and mounted a posse and allowed himself to be led back to the old Tildy claim, but it still didn't make sense. The fat man had walked off that morning, in his right mind as far as any one could tell, and had returned stark, raving crazy.

Peabody tried to pierce the mental fog closing in ever tighter. "Voice—dead—diamonds—hello there. . . ." It was an effort for him to speak. When he finished he stood panting, brushing the crawling graveworms off his tortured body. Then his twisting fingers clutched his thigh as though to form a tourniquet and he panted one last work. "Snake!"

Winson spat a stream of amber tobacco juice, then pushed his battered hat back on his head as he looked at his elderly posse. "One of you fellows may make sense of that. I can't. From the looks of the cabin, I'd say this fellow and Brown had a falling out and maybe Brown tried to kill him. But why is way over my head."

"Mine, too," agreed the man who had asked who Guzik was. "Not that it makes much difference. It looks like Brown has skipped. And this fellow here has a date with a padded cell down at Camarillo."

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A long-tailed green and white bird with a yellow bill perched saucily on the ridge pole of the flower-covered shack, cocking its head, and said, "Hello there. Nuts to you. Ha, hah!"

"Bird," Peabody said thickly. "Bird."

None of the posse men were impressed. "Yeah. A magpie," Sheriff Winson told him. "Must have been a pet of Brown's. If a man's got the patience and the time, he can teach a magpie to talk as well if not better than any parrot. But we ain't here to discuss birds. What's eatin' you, man?"

The fat man tried to tell him, but the black fog closed in, thick and irrevocable. "Diamonds," he babbled. "That's what I'm digging for. Diamonds."

Sheriff Winson turned his horse in disgust. "Oh, hell! I've had enough of that. There must be something about this old claim that sends everyone nuts on diamonds. One of you fellows swing the poor devil up behind you and we'll take him on into town and turn him over to the state patrol."

One of the posse men did as he was ordered, and from the ridge pole of the shack the magpie laughed raucously.

"Guzik," Peabody said thickly.

"No," the posse man on whose horse he was riding corrected. "That's just a magpie, fellow. Darndest pests and thieves you ever saw. Come right in the house and carry off things if you don't watch 'em. Specially anything bright or shiny. Yes, sir. I bet we might be surprised if we knew all that was in his nest."

He turned his horse and rode off with the others, the fat man clinging to him.

Behind them, the clearing was silent a moment. Then it came to life again with a great cheeping and twittering and scolding as the long-tailed yellow-beaked bird on the ridge pole streaked through the sky to its nest thirty feet up in a tall pine, screaming raucously, "Hello there! Well, here's to crime! Ha, hah, ha, ha, ha!"

Die on My Doorstep

(Continued from page 105)

I held stiff.

"I'm sorry you got into this," he said, his voice suddenly failing. "I've always liked you. But I have a family. I had to kill her to spare them, and now I have to—"

I didn't hear his step—I guessed it. I swung around, gripping the picture frame in both hands.

Stan's face was huge in front of me—his right hand was high—holding a pistol by the barrel—bringing it down at my head—the picture frame gashed into his temple.

He took a queer, hopping step sideways—his legs tangled and he sat down with a bump.

I dropped the picture, rushed at him, ripped the pistol from his hand. A heavy .45. I stepped back.

Stan's head wavered—his glance meandered groggily across his sprawling legs. A red grimace oozed from his temple.

"So now you've got me," he mumbled.

"I'm sorry," I said. I sounded crazy to myself. The man had just tried to slug me and then, probably slit my throat—and I was sorry.

"I'm sorry," I said again.

"That's what I thought," he said, his voice once more infected with weariness.

His face turned down. I saw his hand slowly move up his leg—then dive into his coat pocket. My heart thumped. I slapped down the safety lock on the pistol.

His hand came out of his pocket with nothing—nothing I could see.

His hand moved to his mouth.

Maybe I could have stopped him. Maybe if I had dived at him, I could have caught his hand. Probably not.

He closed his eyes and swallowed.

I picked up the phone and called the detective division. Then I sat down and waited for Stan Harvester, my friend, to die.

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"FINEST MADE"

New Detective Magazine

(Continued from page 8)

Dear Editor:

I think that contributions by the readers to *The Witness Chair* is a good idea. It makes *New Detective*, which I think is fine, even better for me. Here's my contribution:

As late as the time of the American Revolution, English law prescribed that a person accused of crime who refused to testify on the witness stand should be pressed to death. The usual method was to place the culprit under a wide door, and then pile on stones until the life was crushed out of him.

John Leeds
Atlanta, Georgia

And if you think that's bad, then get a load of this:

Dear Editor:

In sixteenth-century Germany, the crime of killing a tree was considered to be even more serious than the murder of a human being. Anyone who injured a standing tree had his intestines tied to the tree, and was then forced to encircle it until the wound was covered. For the crime of setting fire to a woods, the offender was tied in a steerhide and thrown three paces in front of the raging fire; this was repeated three times, whether the culprit was alive or dead.

Richard Bauer
Pittsburgh, Pa.

Compared to that, doing a five-to-ten stretch in a good old U.S. jail would be a picnic, and never mind the ants.

Dear Editor:

Several of the American Colonies assessed fines in commodities rather than in cash. For four successive absences from church, a Virginian was fined fifty pounds of tobacco, and various other quantities for different infractions of the law. Maryland also assessed fines in tobacco, and South Carolina in rice.

Louis Bates
Orange, Va.

You probably couldn't see the judge for smoke. We'll have to leave the world of crime in its artificial fog, fans. We've just about finished the last mile. But we'll meet again to take up murder and mayhem in the next issue. Until then, Happy Crime-hunting!

—THE EDITORS

Build a Fine Business—FULL or SPARE TIME!

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MASON JACKETS and COATS

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Smart, masculine military style coat **SELLS FAST** to men who want rain-protection with smart styling, long wear. Also leather jackets, raincoats, colorful fac-Shirts. Get Free Outfit **NOW!**



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Harry R. Williamson

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Charles Tuttle



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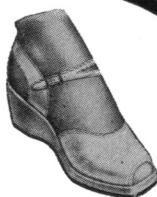
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